

WHAT WE WERE: FEMALE TEMPORALITY IN CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

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What We Were is a feature-length film that follows 22-year-old Lee Wallace. She returns home to El Paso, Texas after college graduation for two weeks before moving to New York to start a new life as an entry-level writer for a literary magazine.

On her first night back, Lee runs into two of her old friends and, motivated by nostalgia and her fear of the future, agrees to rejoin the high school group of misfits. After a wild night of drinking and catching up, they enter in a pact to re-create experiences from their communal high school past. What begins as an innocent experiment in nostalgia soon becomes an addictive obsession as they continue to push the boundaries of memory and time.

The film explores a specifically female experience of coming of age, experiencing memory, and trying to exist within a pervasively male definition of female sexuality. In addition, I address common anxieties that accompany the post-college transition period and are typical of the quarter-life identity crisis. This project embodies my unique aesthetic, which blends subtly and surrealism, and focuses on a story that is deeply infused with experiences from my own life.

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To my loved ones, I owe who I am as both a person and an artist to you. Thank you for always encouraging me to be fearless.

“How is one to grasp reality
if one attributes reality to its systemic deformation?
If one attempts to gauge reality using deformed reality as a norm.
How is one to interact with others if one’s notion of reality
is grounded in the reality of the fixed gaze?”

Klaus Wyborny

INTRODUCTION

It was a freezing cold November morning and the sun was still hidden beneath the clouded horizon. It was our second day on set of the short film “Home,” which I wrote, shot, directed, and edited while studying at Europe’s oldest and most prestigious film school in Prague, Czech Republic. I stood outside a jazz bar on the Vltava River waiting for the manager to arrive to let us in. My shoulders shook from the cold as I ran through the schedule of shots in my head and took preliminary light meter readings. For months now I had been having nightmares in which I arrived at this exact location without any idea of the story I wanted to tell. In one of them we had been unable to secure an actor for the main role. In another I miscalculated the ratio of seconds to meters of film and woke up covered in sweat as the end of the reel flapped frantically in its metal container.

Needless to say, I had plenty on my anxiety-riddled mind when a grizzled, middle-aged man approached me reeking of booze. It took me a moment to notice the looming man unsteadily eyeing me. I smiled politely and inched away, returning to the task of running through various check lists in my head. He followed. I asked if I could help him. He didn’t respond, but the corners of his mouth turned up as he continued to leer at me. I asked our Czech production manager to see what the man wanted. He questioned him, but still no answer. I moved away again, feeling his eyes follow me. He asked in broken English how much I cost. I told our production manager to tell the man it was time for him to leave. He wasn’t so inclined.

The man continued to barter for sex for several more minutes before the manager arrived and let us inside. Again, he followed. I told the production manager to

escort the man outside and lock the door. The man resisted and our production manager shrugged sheepishly. After a terse conversation in Czech, I was informed that this man was the night manager of the bar and that he would stay as long as he pleased. Nothing overtly terrible happened. Eventually the man left to sleep off his drunkenness; we shot the film, and a few weeks later it was nominated for the Cannes Film Festival Student Competition. I returned to the States with a wealth of experience, five months of memories, and the haunting sound of that man's voice. Granted, this is a fairly extreme example, but unfortunately not an unfamiliar one to the women of our world.

These casual, unquestioned moments of sexism present themselves through film as well, a trend that has led to the emergence of feminist film collectives and support for female artists. I would argue that the single most unifying element in feminist film is the desire to break from convention in order to establish female voice(s). This is what Germaine Dulac envisioned as the avant-garde, a form of expression Sandy Flitterman-Lewis describes in "Germaine Dulac: First Feminist of the Avant-Garde" in which "feminist filmmaking meant working at the very sources of cinematic expression, through the manipulation of formal elements, in order to provide an alternative to the dominant film practice, to speak in *another* voice" (Flitterman-Lewis 48). This is what Lauren Rabinovitz refers to in "Maya Deren and an American Avant-Garde Cinema," when she proposes that Deren's films "rework existing film language to inscribe a place for female subjectivity" (Rabinovitz 52) and what Agnes Varda meant when she described her quest for her language rather than her filmic style (Flitterman-Lewis 218). This is why feminist filmmakers Lizzie Borden and Anna Biller made films like *Born in*

Flames (1983) and *Viva* (2007), which redefine and reinvent subgenres of science fiction and sexploitation.

In this academic treatise I will detail the lengthy multi-faceted process behind the making of *What We Were*, before turning my focus to the concept of the female film and its stylistic tropes, particularly in terms of temporality and genre. I will draw upon other films and female filmmakers to illustrate my inspirations and motivations for the film. If anything, I hope this treatise and the accompanying film that together form my thesis will provide a new perspective within the largely male-driven film industry. I hope that it will encourage other young women to push their way into fields that might not readily accept them. Finally, I hope that it will add to the chorus of voices urging that we celebrate our diversity, rather than fear it. Our current political and social climate may often be one of intolerance and bigotry, but we will not be readily silenced.

PROCESS

PRE-PRODUCTION

I began this project in Prague while finishing my time at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU). I knew I wanted to do something big; something I might not have the opportunity to do again for some time after leaving the relative safety and vast resources of the University. I decided that I wanted to make my first feature length film. I felt the same nervous excitement that accompanies over-caffeination, that static buzz that hovers at the edge your skin. I called my parents and told them my idea. They were wary about the immensity of the project, but overall supportive. Then came the task of finding mentors.

I spoke with fourteen professors before finding two who were enthusiastic, positive, or maybe just crazy enough to sign onto the project. During the period of the fourteen denials, I began to doubt myself. I was told that my idea was over-ambitious, that I would never be able to complete it in time while enrolled as a full-time student, and that I would be unable to gather the vast resources needed for a project of this size. One professor told me I was not ready to undertake a feature length film, others cited the fact that not even the master's students attempted projects of this size. This electronic trail of rejections traveling across the globe to reach my laptop in Prague in no way meant that I ended up with second-rate advisors. On the contrary, it ensured that when I found the two members of my thesis committee, I knew they were the exact people for the task. What I found in my supervisor and second reader was the same unbridled enthusiasm to create and determination to succeed that I had fostered for the project, and without these qualities I doubt our working relationship or my thesis would

have been successful. These many denials only reinforced the importance of the project, while my mentors' unwavering support solidified my confidence in my ability.

With my thesis committee secured, I began working to cultivate my ideas and begin molding the shape of my story and the people in it. I read Syd Field's illuminating manual "Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting" and used it as my guide throughout the preparation and research stages of my writing. As Field suggested, I began not with a plot summary, but with in-depth biographies of each character from birth until the moment the film began. I ended up with a ten-page, single-spaced document containing each of my nine characters' life stories, including the city of El Paso whose landscape and nature are essential to the film. Next, I sketched out the skeleton of the narrative itself. During this time, I began to research for both narrative and stylistic inspirations. I watched films, noted plot structures, cultivated a playlist of music, looked at art, and read books and articles on subjects such as nostalgia, memory, life transitions, and cults.

Throughout the spring semester, I met bi-weekly with my thesis advisers and received detailed feedback on my preliminary work. I revised, reworked, and strengthened my characters and the outline of the plot for three months before I ever wrote a word of dialogue. At this point, I had become intimate with each of my characters. In mid-March I sat down and wrote the screenplay for the film over the course of four days. I completely isolated myself from the outside world, and spent those four days in conversation with the film's characters. It was only possible to create the first draft of the script in such a short time because of the preceding months of exhaustive research, character development, and plot outlines. That week passed in a

delirious blur; then came the real challenge of reintegrating into society and embarking on multiple rewrites.

My meetings with my supervisor accelerated in frequency, becoming weekly appointments. Each session was spent workshopping individual scenes, examining each line of prose and questioning the believability of each line of dialogue. Within the next two months I produced three complete drafts and began working on the logistical aspects of pre-production. The first hurdle I tackled during the pre-production phase was the process of acquiring equipment. After running the numbers, I found that it made more economical sense to buy the essential equipment I needed rather than rent. The cost of buying a camera, monitor, and lighting equipment was only slightly higher than the cost of renting for the anticipated shooting window and would ensure that I had enough time in advance to practice and gain working knowledge of the equipment. In addition, the future possibility for renting the equipment out to other filmmakers ensured that I could make back the money spent. Owning this equipment would also increase my value as an independent filmmaker.

I researched various models of cameras and spent many long hours in conversation with representatives of Precision Camera in Austin. After narrowing the list down, I shot and reviewed test footage before deciding on the Sony FS5, an Atomos Shogun monitor and video recorder, and a three-piece LED lighting set. In addition, I purchased several smaller, but necessary, items such as lighting gels, sandbags, reflectors, extension cords, and extra batteries. With the equipment purchased, I headed home to El Paso to continue preparations for production. These included setting

up a production office, rehearsal space, and storage room to serve as our base of operations throughout the summer.

One of the most important aspects of making a film is securing a strong cast and crew. I had decided that I would shoot and direct the film myself, but knew I would need help auditioning, rehearsing, and coaching actors on set. Early in the process, I met with local writer, actor, and director of an independent theater company, and brought him on board as my casting director and acting coach. Together, we discussed the screenplay and characters, as well as my overall vision for the film. We crafted an audition call and sent it out to theater, film, and acting groups in El Paso and the surrounding areas. The casting process was split into three stages: the first consisted of individual short readings of chosen scenes from the film, the second, a longer reading session where I worked with the actors to make adjustments, and the third, group sessions where we watched how the actors worked in relation to each other. After several weeks, we made our decisions and secured the full cast.

While I had been superficially involved in the El Paso art scene since high school, I knew I needed a local, working filmmaker to help me find the right crew. I met with a highly experienced writer, director, editor, and lighting technician to get a feel for the local talent. After describing the way I work and what I was looking for in a crew, he was able to recommend several people who he had worked with before. I began emailing, calling, and setting up meetings with each of these artists to discuss the project, as well as their availability and interest. During my individual meetings, I told them about myself, asked questions about their experience, and answered questions about the script. As I was working with professionals, I also had to negotiate pay rates.

Luckily, the crew was enthusiastic about the project and, understanding that this was an independent student film, volunteered their expertise for lower rates than they would typically command in commercial work.

Once I had my cast and crew, we began regular rehearsal periods and meetings. We brought the entire cast and all essential crew together for the first time late in June for a full read through of the script. After the read through I received notes from the essential crew and had an in-depth discussion with my casting director about the screenplay. These conversations along with the experience of hearing the dialogue read aloud by the actors helped me to finish a fourth extensive rewrite of the screenplay. Throughout the next month, I held rehearsals with the actors several times a week. During these rehearsals we discussed character motivations, tried different interpretations, and practiced acting exercises to help the cast feel comfortable around each other.

The crew meetings were generally more individualized, with weekly full crew meetings to check on everyone's progress. With my producer I worked through the budget for cast, crew, equipment, craft services, location permits, and other miscellaneous items. We also drafted contracts for every person participating in the film and obtained insurance for all members for the duration of the project. With my assistant director I made a shotlist detailing the camera movement and equipment necessary for every shot of the film, scouted locations, held meetings with the owners of these locations, and worked out contracts granting us permission to shoot on their property. Together, we also looked at each member of the cast and crew's schedules, as well as the availability of each location, to create a daily schedule for each day of

shooting. With my craft services coordinator, I planned meals and snacks for each production day and made sure that we always had plenty of water and coffee on hand. With my second assistant director and production designer I chose costumes and props for every scene and scheduled walk-throughs at each location to go over any adjustments we would need to make to the space. With my first and second assistant cameras, I went through shotlists and storyboards for each shoot day and practiced setting up, using, and putting away the equipment.

In addition to these meetings with crewmembers, I also had plenty of work to do on my own. For each city-owned location (i.e. parks, streets, sidewalks) I had to fill out an application for a film permit. This consisted of compiling photos of the location, explaining the intended use of the location, detailing the number of people, cars, and equipment that would be on-site during filming, and creating maps of each location with diagrams showing what angles and directions we would be shooting. Additionally, I had to file permits with the El Paso Independent School District in order to use El Paso High School as a location. During the remainder of the pre-production period, I finished compiling and/or building any additional equipment we might need, recorded expenses, created lighting and camera diagrams, shot additional test footage with the camera, and negotiated music usage rights. Furthermore, I worked to secure funding for the film through grant applications, a Kickstarter campaign, and private donors. After nearly seven months of intense preparation, we were ready to shoot by early July.

PRODUCTION

Each day of production was unpredictable. No matter how much planning goes into a film, things always have a habit of changing on set. Sometimes things go wrong, sometimes locations fall through, and sometimes it rains. This constant state of flux, adjustment, and readjustment makes filmmaking extremely challenging, but also highly gratifying. You can plan every minute of the day, but once you get on set things will change, and often these changes lead to small miracles of inspiration.

At the beginning of each shoot day, a small team would load all of the equipment needed and transport it to the location. All essential crew would arrive early to the location to prepare for the day. The second assistant director would begin dressing the set, the craft services manager would lay out snacks and water, the producer would run through the schedule with the location owner, and the assistant director, assistant camera, sound recordist, and I would run through the schedule and position of shots. After this, the camera would be built as per the specifications of the first shot, memory cards would be formatted, systems checked, and lighting and camera dolly set ups tested. When the actors arrived on set, they were sent for any makeup and/or hair touch ups and put in costume. Then, the acting coach would run through the scene with them while we finished setting up.

We did camera and acting rehearsals for each take before actually recording. Shooting is very much like a dance, with the camera, actors, and crewmembers all executing precise choreography. During every take my brain was focused on dozens of things at once: watching for good performances from the actors, making sure the shot stayed in focus, checking for proper camera movement and framing, checking to see if

we were on schedule, thinking through the next set up, making sure no equipment showed up in the shot, and listening for sounds of airplanes, trains, or dogs barking that might obscure the sound of the dialogue. At the same time, I tried to let each location inspire me to try something new. On every shoot I added, changed, and removed shots, each time re-evaluating the day's schedule and communicating new information to the cast and crew. There were moments when I felt my methods and credibility questioned by the largely older male crew, but overall my cast and crew were extremely talented and worked well as a cohesive unit, enabling us to move swiftly through an aggressive shooting schedule that often consisted of twelve-hour days and many all night shoots.

At the end of each shoot, the memory cards from the camera, monitor, and sound recorder were uploaded to my computer, and backups made of each file. Each shot was quickly checked for technical problems before the memory cards were formatted and replaced. All batteries were plugged into charging stations and all equipment cleaned, checked, and packed away. Finally, the essential crew and I would run through any difficulties from the day and begin preparation for the next. On days when we were not shooting, we were getting ready for the days that we were. In the end, we completed principal photography over fourteen days, finishing on time despite several scheduling and location complications.

POST-PRODUCTION

The calm after production was unsettling. After several months of frenetic energy and constant movement, the isolation of post-production caught me off guard. I always experience depression after the completion of a production, and unfortunately the

immensity of this project mirrored the monstrosity of the aftermath. This is the artist's curse; the mental anguish and anxiety that both inspires and precludes art. The vicious cycle of depression and anxiety is as much a part of my creative process as it is my life.

After an intermission period spent struggling to pull myself out of the post-production void, I began the process of editing. I catalogued files, synced sound recordings with images, took notes on camera movement and performance, and strung together a rough cut of the film. Production involved long hours in the blazing sun or working through the night, racing the dawn surrounded by dozens of people waiting to receive direction. The process of editing has consisted largely of quiet, solitary nights spent illuminated by my computer's blue glow. I have spent my time vacillating between big picture cohesion and obsessive details. Soon, however, I will begin to collaborate again as I work with sound mixers, colorists, and graphic designers to finalize the film, and later with producers, festivals, and distributors as I work to reach an audience. Even after my impending graduation, I will continue to obsess over this project, cutting and re-cutting until I have the courage to free the film from my grasp.

TEMPORALITY

In highlighting elements important to this film, I would like to first discuss the concept of temporality in the female film. Feminist filmmaker Maya Deren was fascinated with the ability to manipulate time through film and posited the theory in "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality," that slow motion is a concept that exists within our minds, not on the screen: "It is because we are aware of the known pulse of the identified action while we watch it occur at a slower rate of speed that we experience the double-exposure of time which we know as slow-motion" (Deren 68). Deren's wording here is significant; she describes the process of watching slow motion as a subconscious superimposition of images and temporalities. Without recognition of the normal, the reproduced has no implication; slow motion cannot exist individually, but only in relationship to the conventions of normal speed.

Mary Scott Albert's essay "Towards a Theory of Slow Motion," provides a useful discussion on the effect of slow motion in film. She discusses Sergei Eisenstein's theory of slow motion as a form of conflict: "We can see slow motion as a kind of montage of temporality, where the conflict is not only between an event and its temporal nature but between differing/simultaneous temporalities" (Albert 13). This conflict is derived from the idea that a slow motion shot is an alternative to the original image. We see in "real time," therefore any change in speed from the standard twenty-four frames per second cannot exist as an original, only as a subjective derivation.

This concept of assigning meaning through opposition or conflict is intrinsically female. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey posited a psychoanalytic connotation of the woman in film in her iconic essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

Ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the absence of the penis as visually ascertainable, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex essential for the organization of entrance to the symbolic order and law of the father (Mulvey 21).

In the same way that slow motion obtains meaning as a counter method to the standard twenty-four frames per second, so too are women assigned meaning based on their otherness in the face of man. Not only is the woman burdened with definition by a patriarchal society, she is also continually subjected to the male gaze inherent in film language.

There are three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion (25).

Because film is a male-dominated industry, which produces cinema for a patriarchal society, these various gazes are “obsessively subordinated to the neurotic needs of the male ego” (25). Both non-traditional temporality and the role of the female in cinema share a definitive sense of otherness placed upon them by dominant forces. Hence the use of slow motion can be analytically tied to the portrayal of a female subjectivity, while the slowing of movement provides a unique opportunity for the viewer to recognize his/her role within the three voyeuristic gazes of film.

I frequently used slight slow motion in *What We Were* for multiple purposes and desired effects: to demonstrate a subjective female perspective, elaborate the characters’ unique positions within both the present and the past, and contribute to the film’s subtle references to the horror film genre. By shooting regularly at sixty frames per second rather than the typical twenty-four, I attempted to mimic the luxurious pace

evident in films like Ana Lily Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014); in which objects and people are allowed to move heavily, slowly through space without ever being prodded forward. Albert describes the process of slow motion saying, "Because we can't possibly be watching a slow-motion event live, it must be in the past, a memory" (Albert 15). In this film, we cannot stop there. Since it cannot be the present, the slow motion segments must exist either within the past, future, or as part of a subjective process. *What We Were* is told through subjective recollection; the use of slow motion becomes equivocated with a specifically female experience. We then must question if space is changed by its temporal relation to the present, and furthermore, how that space might differ within the realm of memory. This temporal trope appears frequently throughout the film, creating a realm in which time and space cannot exist as separate entities.

Thematically, this divergence from traditional linear temporality is represented through the group's ritualistic restaging of their high school memories. In this way, the content and form are intrinsically connected through their temporal derivations. Each of the spaces within the film exist simultaneously in the past and present, haunted by the ghostly memories of previous summer nights together. Similarly, the characters inhabit several temporal versions of themselves: the people they are now and the people they were in high school. This suggested physical impossibility cannot be depicted in twenty-four frames per second and is thus relegated to the subjective sixty frames. Additionally, this slow motion adds to the sacred nature of the group's endeavors: "...by shifting emphasis from the purpose of the movement to the movement itself, an informal social encounter then assumes the solemnity and dimension of ritual" (Deren 70). The choice

to shoot in slow motion thus binds content and form through an exploration of female subjectivity and the possibility of space to contain multiple temporalities simultaneously.

The most prominent use of slow motion in the film presents itself during the sex scene midway through the film. Throughout this segment, Lee struggles with conflicted consent in her relationship with Riley. She is not forced into sexual acts, but neither does she openly welcome them. Mulvey explains this conflict:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure, which is styled accordingly (Mulvey 19).

Because of Lee's passivity, Riley is granted full agency over the encounter, exploiting her implied consent as a means to write his desire onto her. However, contrary to dominant film culture, Lee as the female figure is not molded into an object of desire, causing the viewer to question the validity of the male gaze as a controlling force in both society and film. The concept of slow motion as a warring duality between temporalities is presented here as the dichotomy between Lee's implied consent, portrayed by the sensual nature of the scene, and her passive rejection of Riley's advances, shown through her emotionless, blank stare, which radiates a desire for escape from her emotions, fears, and Riley's advances. Visually, the portrayal of a sex scene that is contradictory to those typically seen in Hollywood blockbusters demonstrates a rewriting of the prevalently male filmic discourse by illustrating the perspective of a woman, trapped in a situation to which she has not fully consented, but can neither actively reject. By employing the use of slow motion, the viewer is forced to watch every

excruciating detail of this conflict and consider their voyeuristic pleasure before Lee's deadened eyes.

GENRE

Within the film, Lee is portrayed as both victim and aggressor. She is frozen by her fear of the future, resulting in a passivity that is easily exploited by Riley. However, this same passivity also results in the violation of Lili's sexuality. *What We Were* is not a horror film, but it does frequently borrow from the genre in this regard. Lee is not a likeable protagonist, and while she is not portrayed as an otherworldly monster, she does display subtle fiendish tendencies. For instance, she consistently feeds on the people who surround her, exploiting their intimacies for her own personal gain. This thematic content is portrayed throughout the film through the use of various camera techniques typically found in the horror genre. The previously discussed use of slow motion adds to a general sense of unease pervasive throughout the film by manipulating time away from the norm. Additionally, several segments purposefully exclude Lee's face, much like the horror film that increases suspense by obscuring the monster; while others mimic her point of view in a voyeuristic manner as is typical of monster films.

Rhona Berenstein's "Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema," provides a feminist reading of the horror genre, helpful as a framework for working through the film. Berenstein discusses the common deviancy of the horror film monster and its female counterpart proposing "...while the looks exchanged between fiends and heroines express victimization on the part of women, they also speak of their shared status with the fiend as outsiders to patriarchy" (Berenstein 104). Here Berenstein is referring to the classic horror model where the monster is coded male and the female is subjugated to the role of damsel in

distress. Both are considered outsiders in comparison to the prescribed norms of maleness and humanness. When the female herself is the fiend, she becomes even farther removed from normative patriarchal society. Without a counterpart with whom to share looks, she has no choice but to stare blankly past the camera.

Not only does Lee represent subversion in the embodiment of both fiend and female, she also defies conventional gender tropes. Berenstein offers a theory of transvestitism in an attempt to read the fluid nature of gender and sexuality within both the horror genre and its spectatorship. The traditional male vampire is sexualized by his method of killing, which involves suckling and sharing of bodily fluids. He is thus both heterosexual and homosexual in his nondiscriminatory choice of both male and female victims. While the male fiend is given the status of transvestite through his transitory sexual nature, the female is also given the opportunity to defy expectations both through the way she views and participates in the film. Berenstein describes the female who is pleased through her identification with the fiend and against a socially constructed femininity: "As a form of drag, the woman who masquerades is, through her performance of femininity separated from the conventional female role" (51). While on screen, Lee preys on both men and women indiscriminately, and her role as fiend places her within a tradition of sexual fluidity, as evidenced by her exploitation of both Riley and Lili's attraction to her. Her identity as female outsider allows her to engage in subtle transvestitism under the cover of her high school persona rather than the traditional mask.

Historically, female directors have found their place in genre films, perhaps feeling more comfortable working within a genre that has similarly been relegated to the

fringes of the industry. Berenstein aptly summarizes the deep connection between the horror genre and feminism: “Amidst signifiers of fear and desire, loathing and longing, classic horror celebrates mobile spectatorial positions, the dissolution of conventional gender traits, the fragility of the heterosexual couple, and the precariousness of patriarchal institutions and values” (59). Ironically, the genre that instills fear by subverting the norm is a feminist filmmaker’s haven, a place free of the traditional systems that subjugate women to second-class citizenry.

CONCLUSION

While this project was and continues to be a huge undertaking, with a workload and scale that far exceed the typical Plan II thesis, I am thrilled to end my academic career at the University of Texas at Austin with the anticipated completion of my first feature film. *What We Were* explores the female experience of coming of age and the common anxieties tied to the post-graduation transition through subjective temporality. By donning her high school persona, Lee attempts to escape her fear of the future by succumbing to the addictive euphoria of nostalgia. Within the film, I explore ideas of ritual within our social interactions as well as the process of identity building. Through the creation of this film, I have followed in the footsteps of feminist filmmakers who have and continue to strive to create a place for female voices to be heard within the film industry. This off-camera struggle often presents as the subject of the film itself and has certainly shaped my identity as a female filmmaker.

What We Were has the potential to jump-start my film career and put me on the map as a female auteur who is not afraid to take risks. Throughout this endeavor I experienced the harsh realities of the student film world, in which we are continually encouraged to create, but not always given full support to achieve. These obstacles only strengthened my drive to disprove those who did not believe in my worth as an artist and/or my specific vision for the film. I plan to use this project as my introduction to the artistic community, where I hope to continue creating stories that challenge the norm, explore new perspectives, and are made by and for those often excluded by the film industry.

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WHAT WE WERE

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EXT. A REST STOP IN THE DESERT - DAY

A car sits parked in front of a rest stop. It's the only one. The buildings are made of adobe. Empty desert extends to the horizon in every direction. There are mountains in the distance. The air is dry, heavy with summer heat. A gentle breeze stirs the patchy grass. It's the only greenery in sight, foreign to the wild landscape.

A young woman (early 20s), LEE, emerges from the farthest building. She walks evenly across the large distance separating her from the car. She reaches the curb and stops, turning towards the distant mountains. She stands there for a minute, maybe more, perfectly still. Finally she moves. She turns and walks the last few steps to the car and gets inside. She turns on the car and the radio comes on with it. She pulls out of the parking lot and onto the empty highway, headed towards the mountains.

MONTAGE WITH CREDITS:

Various shots highlighting the desert landscape - the same location they visit at the end of the film - white sand dunes, dead brush, vast openness, the mountains in the background.

EXT. LEE'S HOUSE (LATE AFTERNOON)

LEE walks around to the front of the house and climbs the stairs to the door. She pulls out her keys and flips through them looking for the one to the house. It takes her a minute to realize she doesn't have a key anymore. She rings the doorbell instead. After a few moments, a middle-aged but youthful looking man, PAUL, enters the front room. It's her uncle. He sees LEE and lights up. He crosses the floor and opens the door, leaning against the door frame.

PAUL
(grinning boyishly)
Hey stranger.

LEE
(smiling widely)
Hey yourself.

They stand apart looking each other over for a minute before PAUL pulls her roughly in for a hug. He squeezes her hard. LEE squeezes back, burying her head into his chest.

PAUL
Thank God you're back. Your dad
found that bottle of Scotch in my
closet last week and I've been
under house arrest ever since.

LEE
I told you that wasn't a good
hiding place.

PAUL
(smiling)
I should listen to you more often.
(shouting towards the back
of the house)
PETER your daughter's home!
(turning back to LEE)
Your car do alright on the drive?

LEE
Yep. No problems.

PAUL
Remind me to check your oil before
you leave.

LEE
Kay.

PETER, LEE's father, enters the room. He's a tall middle-aged
man with a kind face, but tired eyes.

PETER
Hey baby.
(checking his watch)
You got here fast.

LEE
I said I'd be here by 5.

PETER wraps LEE up in a hug. She hugs him tightly back.

PETER
Well anyway it's good to have you
home.

LEE
Yeah. It's nice to be back.

PETER
How was the drive?

LEE
Fine.

PETER
No problems?

LEE
Nope everything was good.

PETER
Did you eat yet? I can make something if you want.

LEE
No I'm fine. I grabbed some food on the way into town.

There's a brief silence. PETER has exhausted all the typical small talk.

PETER
You wanna put your stuff down? Settle in?

LEE
Yeah sounds good.

PETER walks with LEE through the house towards her childhood bedroom. He keeps a hand on her shoulder. PAUL follows behind them.

PETER
I have to confess we've been using your room for storage lately. I tried to move some of it out before you got here, but it's still a bit of a mess.

LEE
I'm sure it's fine. I won't be here long anyway.

PETER
Well feel free to move anything that's in your way. It's still your room.

LEE opens the door and enters her room as her dad finishes his thought. She flips on the lights. One whole wall is lined with boxes and stacks of miscellaneous objects. LEE is caught off guard by the scale of the invasion of her space. The room feels smaller with all the extra stuff. She looks around. There's a coat of dust on the surface of her dresser. Her old desk is cluttered with blue books and her dad's grade book.

PETER notices LEE's quietness.

PETER (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I know it's not how you
left it.

LEE
It's fine, dad. Really.

LEE sets her bag down on the bed. PETER quickly begins to
collect his papers from the desk. PAUL stands in the doorway
watching.

PETER
Listen, I know you just got back,
but would you mind running to the
store? Your mom made a list, but
she's going late with a showing.

PAUL
I can go. Let LEE get settled.

PETER
LEE can go.
(to LEE)
Tell you what. I'll keep working on
this while your gone and have it in
better shape for you when you get
back. Sound good?

LEE
Yeah. Thanks.

PETER
The lists on the counter.
(a pause, he proceeds
awkwardly)
Do you need money?

LEE
No, I'm good.

PETER
Save the receipt and I'll get you
back.

PETER turns and gets to work tidying up the room. LEE leaves
the room. As she walks past PAUL she mouths "SORRY." He
brings a finger gun to his temple and pretends to pull the
trigger.

INT. GROCERY STORE (SAME DAY - EVENING)

LEE pushes a semi-full cart along the canned food aisle,
reading the list as she goes. The store is blindingly white.

Harsh fluorescents shine overhead. She reaches the end of the aisle and stops, trying to figure out what she's missing. She looks up surveying the surrounding aisles. She turns left and walks past a few rows before turning into the wine aisle. She parks the cart and starts searching for the brand her mom likes. She walks along the row, checking bottles as she goes. She kneels down and pulls out a bottle to read the label.

LILI

LEE?

Startled, LEE looks up towards the voice. LILI (early 20s) stands at the end of the aisle staring at her. LEE slowly stands up, staring in disbelief at her childhood best friend. They haven't seen each other since they graduated high school over four years ago.

LILI regains her composure first and begins walking towards LEE.

LILI (CONT'D)

(overjoyed)

Oh my God. I can't believe it's you!

LEE looks around uncomfortably.

LILI (CONT'D)

How long have you been in town?

LEE

Uhm. I just got in maybe an hour ago.

LILI

How long are you staying? I heard you're moving to New York?

LEE

(surprised)

Yeah. I, uhm.. I'm moving up there in two weeks.

A heavy silence falls over them. They stand facing each other. LILI shakes her head, a tender smile spreading across her face.

LILI

I've missed you.

LEE

(genuinely)

I missed you, too.

SARAH (early 20s), another member of LEE and LILI's high school friend group comes around the corner towards the two of them carrying a pack of beer.

SARAH
(to LILI)
I couldn't find the kind they
wanted, but this one looks kind of
the same and it was pretty cheap so
I..

SARAH trails off mid sentence as she gets close enough to realize who LILI is talking to.

LILI
(turning around, smiling)
Look who I found.

SARAH
LEE? Oh my God!

SARAH drops the beer and runs to hug LEE. LILI watches, but keeps her distance.

SARAH (CONT'D)
How are you? God, it's been so
long!

LEE is overwhelmed by the ambush, but as SARAH hugs her she begins to loosen up. She pulls away from the hug, a faint smile warming up her face.

SARAH (CONT'D)
This is so perfect. I can't believe
we ran into you! Did LILI tell you?
Everyone else is here. Mattie just
came in today.

LEE
Oh. Wow.

SARAH
We're going to LIAM's tonight. If
you came we'd have everyone.

LEE
(nervously)
Oh. I don't know.

SARAH
Everyone would really love to see
you.

LEE looks at LILI, overwhelmed. LILI smiles, comfortingly.

LILI
You should come.

LEE
Yeah. I'll think about it.

SARAH hugs LEE again.

SARAH
So.. we'll see you later?

LEE
Yeah. Maybe.

SARAH's face falls a little, sensing in LEE's tone that she probably won't show up.

SARAH
Well we should probably go. It was
really good to see you LEE.

SARAH and LILI start to head out. As LILI passes she squeezes LEE's arm tenderly.

LILI
(quietly)
Come.

LILI smiles once more before releasing LEE's arm and walking off after SARAH.

LEE stands frozen in place holding the bottle of wine.
Stunned by the interaction.

EXT. GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT (SAME DAY)

LEE loads the last grocery bag into the back of her car. LILI and SARAH are getting in a car in the background. LEE gets in the drivers seat and pulls out the grocery list. She moves her thumb down the list double checking she got everything. She gets to the end and turns the list over quickly to make sure nothings on the back. There's an address written in the corner. She looks at it closer. It's nearby.

EXT. KERN NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS

LEE drives slowly through the neighborhood. She holds the paper with the address against the steering wheel. She cranes her neck looking for addresses and then checking them against the paper. She finds the one and parks the car. She leaves the scrap of paper in the seat and gets out. As she walks up towards the house she notices a "FOR SALE" sign in the yard.

A middle-aged woman's face smiles from it. She's beautiful in an unconventional way.

LEE smiles, understanding where she is. She walks up to the door, and looks through the window. She pushes the door open.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE (SAME DAY - EVENING/NIGHT)

LEE closes the door behind her, trying to make as little noise as possible. The interior is perfectly staged. She walks lightly through the hall and peeks around the corner. The woman from the sign is sitting at a long dining room table, set ornately for dinner. She flips through an art book, sipping on a drink. It's OLIVIA. LEE watches her for a moment before knocking softly on the door frame, getting OLIVIA's attention.

LEE

Hi mom.

OLIVIA looks up startled, but her face quickly brightens into a warm smile.

OLIVIA

Now how did you find me?

LEE

You left the address on the grocery list.

OLIVIA

(chuckling)

Come look at this.

LEE walks over and sits down next to her mom. OLIVIA pushes the book in between them.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

(offering up her glass)

Want some?

LEE grabs it and takes a sip. OLIVIA flips through looking for a specific page.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

This ones my favorite.

LEE admires the photo.

LEE

It's beautiful.

OLIVIA finishes her drink.

OLIVIA
What time is it?

LEE
Almost eight.

OLIVIA
I guess we should head home, huh?

OLIVIA closes the book and stands up. She walks to the kitchen carrying the book and her empty glass. She replaces the book on a shelf as she walks. LEE follows her.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
How was the drive?

LEE
Long.

OLIVIA washes out her glass in the sink.

OLIVIA
(chuckling)
Thanks for running to the store. I really needed a few hours to myself.

She dries the glass with a decorative towel before returning the cup to it's place on the shelf. She turns around making sure everything is back in place.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
Ready?

LEE
Yep.

OLIVIA and LEE leave the house. OLIVIA pulls out a key and locks the door.

OLIVIA
Have you eaten?

LEE
Yeah. I stopped on my way in.

OLIVIA finally stops to really look at her daughter. She smiles and gives LEE a hug, kissing her on the top of her head.

OLIVIA
See you at home.

They each walk to their separate cars.

INT. LEE'S HOUSE (SAME DAY - NIGHT)

OLIVIA and LEE walk into the kitchen carrying the grocery bags. PETER greets them, while PAUL helps them with the groceries.

PETER
Hey! You're both home.

PAUL takes the bags from OLIVIA. OLIVIA walks to her husband and gives him a kiss.

OLIVIA
I pulled up just as she was getting out of the car.

PETER
Perfect timing.

PAUL begins unloading the groceries into the fridge.

OLIVIA
(to PETER)
Do you have to work tonight?

PETER
I have a few hours of grading left.

LEE walks back into her room. She's disappointed to find that not much has changed except PETER's papers have been cleared off the desk. PETER stands in the doorway between the kitchen and LEE's room.

PETER (CONT'D)
(proudly)
Better?

LEE
(flatly)
Yeah.

OLIVIA
(from the other room)
What about you, Leebie?

LEE stares at the mess of boxes that crowd her room. A few things have been removed from her dresser, revealing a stack of her old yearbooks.

INT. LEE'S BEDROOM (LATER THAT NIGHT)

LEE stands in front of a full length mirror. She tilts her head back and forth turning her body, watching how her image changes as she moves. There are a few empty beer bottles on her dresser. She runs her hands through her hair, staring intently at her reflection. She grabs one of the bottles and takes the last sip. She runs her fingers across her face, tracing her features, pulling at her skin, searching for imperfections.

She reaches for a tube of light pink lipstick off her dresser. She moves in towards the mirror until her face is only a few inches away. She opens her mouth and tilts her head back. Her breathe fogs the glass. She traces on the lipstick before rubbing her lips together. She stares into her own eyes. She's ready.

EXT. LIAM'S HOUSE (NIGHT)

LILI, RILEY, LIAM, SARAH, and MATEO sit in a circle outside LIAM's house. They're all in their early 20s, members of LEE's insular high school friend group. There's a small fire going, but other than that it's pretty dark. They're all drinking and laughing, happy to be back together. RILEY messes around with a guitar.

LIAM

So you guys are back for what, two weeks?

LILI

Yeah.

MATEO

Ten days for me.

LIAM

And then what? Back to D.C.?

MATEO

That's the plan. I'll probably be back and forth some though with the campaign coming up.

RILEY

Keep all those stuffy politicians in line for us yeah?

MATEO

(chuckling)
I'll do my best.

LIAM
(asking RILEY's
permission)
Do you want to smoke?

RILEY, LILI, LIAM and SARAH are all up for it. MATEO gives LIAM a disapproving look. LIAM continues packing the bowl, blowing MATEO off.

MATEO
Come on man, we live right next to it. You know how many people have died so you can get high?

LIAM
I know the numbers, Mattie. This bud's from a dispensary in Durango, my cousin brought it down last week. 100% USA I promise.

SARAH
We're just having fun. It's okay to let loose.

MATEO looks to RILEY for guidance.

RILEY
Relax man.

MATEO
(resigning)
As long as you know where it came from.

LIAM, given the okay, finishes packing the bowl into a small glass pipe. There's a noise from the other side of the backyard. A rusted gate creaks open, getting the group's attention.

RILEY
(to LIAM)
Expecting anyone?

LIAM shrugs his shoulders. He wasn't planning on any other guests. A lone dark figure emerges, slowly making its way across the yard towards them. As it gets closer, the fire throws some light across her face. It's LEE. RILEY stops playing.

RILEY (CONT'D)
(quietly to himself in disbelief)
Lee?

LILI recognizes her at the same time and jumps up. She runs over to LEE and grabs her hand.

LILI
You came!

LEE
Yeah.

LILI pulls a nervous LEE over to the rest of the group, bringing her into the circle. None of them were expecting to see her, tonight or really ever. After a moment of shock they begin to smile, thrilled at the sudden return of an old friend. RILEY stares intently at her as if she were a daydream.

LIAM
I don't believe it! LEE WALLACE? In the flesh?

LEE smiles genuinely, not having been the subject of LIAM's performative charm in many years.

LEE
(holding her arms out)
It's me.

LILI pulls her down next to her and the group moves to make a space for her to sit in the circle. It's the first time the group has been complete since high school, four years ago. LIAM takes control, bridging her transition back into their lives.

LIAM
Well now this is a pleasant surprise! Want a beer?

LEE
Sure. Thanks.

LIAM opens up a bottle and passes it to her. She takes a sip.

SARAH
I'm so glad you came!

Everyone echoes the sentiment.

RILEY
Welcome back.

LEE
(blushing)
Thanks. It's been a while.

LIAM
No shit! I think the last time I
saw you was graduation. That was,
what? Four years ago now?

LEE
Just about.

RILEY remains fairly quiet amidst the rest of the group's
spastic excitement. There's a hint of a smile on his face. He
watches LEE intently, mesmerized by her reappearance.

MATEO
So...? Tell us everything. How long
are you here?

LEE
(carefully choosing how
much to reveal so soon)
Uhm. I just finished school in San
Francisco. I'm home for a few weeks
in between leases.

LIAM
Staying in Cali?

LEE
No, actually. I'm going to New
York. I got a job there. Writing
for a magazine.

LIAM
That's awesome Lee!

SARAH
God, I'm so jealous! Are you
excited?

LEE
Yeah. I am.

LIAM
So you're a writer trekking across
the country. What else?

LEE
That's about it I guess.

SARAH
(with a tinge of jealousy)
Come on! You can't tease us with
your rad bi-coastal life and then
not give us any details.

LEE
 There's really not much more. I
 don't know. It's gunna be a big
 change.
 (trying to shift the focus
 away from herself)
 What about you guys, though? What's
 everyone doing now?

LIAM
 (lovingly joking)
 Well, Mattie here's gunning for the
 White House. He's gunna change the
 world. One stoner at a time.

LILI, RILEY, and SARAH chuckle. MATEO rolls his eyes. LEE is
 confused, left out by the reference to the previous
 conversation.

MATEO
 (explaining to LEE)
 I started working at the Capitol a
 few years ago while I was going to
 school. I was planning on law
 school, but I got offered a job at
 the local rep's office so I'm
 putting that on hold for now.

LEE
 That's great. Congratulations.

MATEO
 (passionately)
 Thanks. We're up for reelection
 next spring so it's going to be
 crazy. And after that who knows.

LEE nods in response. SARAH pulls out a pack of cigarettes.
 She puts one in her mouth and offers one to LEE.

LEE
 (as she takes one)
 What about you?

SARAH lights her cigarette and takes a drag. She reaches over
 to light LEE's.

SARAH
 Nothing exciting.

RILEY
 She's being modest. SARA's a
 computer genius.

LIAM
 Seriously. My computer got fucked a few weeks ago and she literally took it apart and rebuilt it herself. Works like new now.

SARAH
 (to Lee)
 It's just something I do to make some extra money. I'm trying to pay off some of my student loans.

LEE
 Do you think you'll stay here?

SARAH
 At least for a few years. I don't really have money to go anywhere else.

LIAM
 You could always go to grad school here.

SARAH
 (unconvincing)
 Yeah I'm sure something will work out.
 (to LEE)
 Did your mom tell you LILI's big news?

LEE
 (to LILI, questioning)
 No.

LILI
 (trying to conceal her excitement)
 I don't know anything yet, but after my senior showcase, I got nominated for an art fellowship in Philadelphia. I'm still waiting to hear back. It doesn't pay much and it's kind of a long shot, but if I get it..

LILI trails off smiling and shrugs. She's trying not to get preemptively excited, but you can tell she is.

LEE
 Wow. That's incredible LILI. I'm so happy for you.

LILI beams.

LIAM
(interrupting LILI's
moment)
Well, RILEY and I will be here
continuing our careers as famed
local rock legends.

RILEY
(laughing)
The band's still together and going
strong. We've been getting paid
lately too.

LIAM
(disillusioned)
Everyone says we're on the cusp of
a break through. I think pretty
soon we'll really start making a
name for ourselves outside the
city.

LEE
That's great. I hope it works out
for you guys.

LIAM
Cheers to that.

LIAM grabs the loaded pipe and a lighter. He lifts the pipe
as if to toast the group, before lighting it and taking a
drag. He exhales slowly, passing the pipe to RILEY.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Man, it sure feels good to have
everyone back together again.

The group nods in agreement. This statement clearly makes LEE
uncomfortable, knowing she's the only one that's been away.

LEE
(awkwardly)
I'm sorry I disappeared. I just.. I
don't know. I should've dealt with
it better. I know it's been a long
time.
(shrugging her shoulders,
flustered)
I don't really know what to say.

LILI
 (squeezing LEE's shoulder)
 Hey, don't worry about it. We're
 just glad to have you back.

RILEY passes LILI the pipe. She takes a hit before handing it to LEE. She smiles comfortingly. LEE returns the smile, relieved that any tension from her absence has been cleared.

LIAM
 (to LEE)
 Remember the first time you hung
 out with us?

LEE
 (laughing)
 We got stuck on that ancient roller
 coaster for over an hour.

RILEY
 (laughing at the memory)
 In hindsight, the pop up carnival
 maybe wasn't our best idea.

LILI
 She stuck around though, so I guess
 we did something right.

LEE
 (playfully)
 I figured at the very least I'd get
 a good story out of it.

The pipe continues to be passed around the circle as they reminisce. Everyone smokes except MATEO who subtly passes it along every time it comes to him. They're starting to feel the effects of the alcohol. The beer and the weed loosen them up, allowing them to fall back into place with one another.

SARAH
 I think my favorite memories from
 high school were when we'd spend
 entire days out in the desert. Just
 out in the open.

MATEO
 Or when we'd stay out at RILEY's
 ranch.

LIAM
 God, remember those awful 70s
 campers we slept in?

MATEO

Every time you sat down clouds of dust would come out of the cushions!

RILEY

We still have them. No one's used them in years, but they're out there.

LILI

Well now you have to keep them. At this point they're basically heritage sites.

LEE laughs along with the conversation.

LEE

I always loved the summers here.

The group joins in a chorus of agreement.

LILI

Especially monsoon season. When the flash floods turned the streets into rivers and the rain was still warm.

LIAM

Remember the summer we found that old canoe?

SARAH

We floated all the way from your house to the university!

MATEO

Ya and then made me carry it back!

SARAH

We helped!

LEE is becoming more and more unresponsive to the conversation, while the rest of the group becomes more animated, laughing through the conversation.

RILEY

Not when we took it to the river, you didn't.

SARAH

There were only two paddles!

LIAM
God that water was so nasty.

RILEY
The best part was when border
patrol started following us.

LILI
We were so uncoordinated we all
ended up in the water. That canoe
probably floated all the way down
to the gulf.

SARAH
(to LEE)
I told you there were weird auras
that day.

LEE
I wasn't there.

LILI
You had to have been! We were all
there. It was the summer before
senior year.

RILEY
(realizing their mistake)
It was the summer after senior
year. Mateo left a week later to
move into his dorm.

LIAM shifts around uncomfortably. The circle is quiet for the
first time. SARAH lights another cigarette as a distraction.

LILI
(embarrassed)
I guess you're right. I must have
gotten mixed up.

LEE
(softly)
It's alright.

After a brief pause, RILEY tries to turn the mood and take
the attention off LEE.

RILEY
Hey you know what we haven't done
in a while? Snuck into the pool.

MATEO
That's high school ground.

RILEY
So?

MATEO
We're not kids anymore.

RILEY
Exactly. We can do whatever we want.

SARAH
You don't think it would be weird?

RILEY
Why would it be? It's just as much ours as anyone else's.
(seeing their unconvinced faces)
Come on. We had some of our best nights there.

LEE
It would be nice to go back.

LIAM has taken hold of the idea and jumps up.

LIAM
Alright, let's do it. In the name of nostalgia!

RILEY
(to the rest of the group)
What do you guys say?

The girls exchange looks before agreeing.

SARAH
(speaking for the collective three)
We're in.

MATEO
(finally letting loose)
Alright let's go!

LIAM
Yes! I'll grab another case of beer.

He takes off towards the house. The energy of the group rises, the girls buzz with excitement at the spontaneous adventure. RILEY and LEE make eye contact across the circle. He smiles at her.

TRANSITION: THE NEIGHBORHOOD POOL, EMPTY, CALM, EERIE

EXT. THE NEIGHBORHOOD POOL (NIGHT)

The crew drunkenly clamors up the iron-wrought fence. One by one they throw their legs over the gate and crawl onto the roof of the equipment shed. LIAM goes first, nimbly hopping from the roof to the ground. RILEY follows suit.

LIAM brings a white, plastic bucket over to the edge of the shed. SARAH hands him over a case of beer from the other side of the fence before climbing up herself.

RILEY offers a hand to LILI and then LEE as they jump down. LEE shares a bashful glance with RILEY as she takes his hand. He turns slightly to watch LEE and LILI run off giggling towards a table below a large tree.

MATEO clears his throat loudly from the roof.

MATEO
(sarcastically)
You not gunna help me down?

RILEY turns around caught off guard. He quickly reassumes his playful character and dramatically holds out his hand to MATEO, while kneeling and bowing his head.

MATEO (CONT'D)
(as he pushes RILEY'S hand
out of the way and jumps
down on his own laughing)
Oh, fuck off!

LIAM
(from the other side of
the pool, holding two
beers cut open for
shotgunning)
Yo Riley, get over here!

RILEY runs off to where LIAM is standing by the diving blocks. MATEO helps SARAH down.

LIAM, now wearing only his boxers climbs onto the diving block. He raises his beer into the air and loudly clears his throat.

LIAM (CONT'D)
(mocking seriousness)
Ladies and gentlemen, your
attention please.
(MORE)

LIAM (CONT'D)

We are gathered here tonight to celebrate the return of Lee Wallace into our lives. We thank you oh mighty cosmic forces for reuniting this miserable band outcasts once again. Born of teenage angst and fueled by low-key alcoholism, may we continue to live through nights we will never remember with friends we will never forget.

The group cheers and applaud LIAM's put on eloquence. LILI gives LEE's shoulder a squeeze and the two exchange a familiar smile.

LIAM (CONT'D)

(turning to RILEY)

To clits, tits, and bong rips!

LIAM and RILEY both pop their beers and quickly shotgun them. They throw the empty cans to the ground and scream with pride. LIAM turns his back to the pool and salutes RILEY before falling backwards into the water.

RILEY laughs as LIAM comes up sputtering and tosses him a beer before quickly pulling off his clothes and jumping in after him. MATEO and SARAH follow suit.

EXT. THE NEIGHBORHOOD POOL UNDER THE TREE (NIGHT)

LILI pulls off her clothes enthusiastically. LEE stands a few steps behind her still, taking in the chaos that just occurred, overcome by a sense of deja vu. Behind them the rest of the crew squeals and splashes.

LILI notices LEE's mood shift and turns to face her, wearing only her bra and underwear. The noise behind them fades away and it's just them.

The two girls stand facing each other solemnly. LILI reaches over and slowly pulls LEE's shirt over her head. LEE raises her arms and lets LILI undress her like a child. LILI drops the shirt keeping her eyes on LEE.

LILI raises her hand silently. Mirroring her action, LEE completes the gesture. They both have small scars across their palms, leftover marks from a blood oath of a past lifetime together. Gently they press their hands together, a mirrored smile creeping to both their faces.

The noise from the water fades back in.

RILEY
(from the pool)
Will you ladies be joining us?

The others in the pool echo his sentiment and call for them to get in. LILI looks at LEE expectantly, waiting for her final decision to rejoin the group.

LEE kicks off her shoes and quickly slides out of her shorts. She grabs LILI's hand.

LEE
(to LILI, softly)
Come on.

The girls grasp each others hands tightly and run and jump into the pool. The others scream in encouragement. LILI and LEE emerge from the water, sputtering and laughing.

EXT. THE NEIGHBORHOOD POOL (NIGHT)

The crew splashes around in the pool. RILEY, LIAM, and SARAH take turns jumping off the lifeguard stand into the water, trying out various tricks. MATEO, LILI, and LEE watch; laughing, yelling out encouragement and insults; ranking the jumps. Eventually they tire out, grab beers, and rejoin the group in the shallow end of the pool.

LIAM
Alright, fingers up.

LILI and MATEO groan knowingly.

MATEO
We're seriously gunna do this?

LIAM
(sarcastically pleading)
Come on Mattie. We promise we won't spill any of your dirty secrets when you run for president.

He winks to the rest of the group.

MATEO
You're lucky I'm feeling sentimental.
(grudgingly giving in)
How many?

LIAM holds up his hand wiggling all five of his fingers.

Everyone else follows suit raising their hands in anticipation.

LIAM
Never have I ever.. woken up with a complete stranger.

RILEY
Seriously?

LIAM
(play punching RILEY)
Fuck off!

SARAH tries to lower a finger without anyone noticing, but LIAM catches her. There is a chorus of laughing and playful awww-ing.

SARAH
One time!

RILEY
Okay, okay, let's not be prudes.

The group slowly quiets down. It's RILEY's turn.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Never have I ever killed an animal.

Everyone is quiet, looking around the circle. LIAM and LILI both put a finger down.

MATEO
Never have I ever slept with a TA or professor.

LEE, visibly embarrassed, slowly lowers a finger. RILEY raises his eyebrows at her.

LIAM
Atta girl!

LEE regains her composure. A smile creeps to her lips and she splashes LIAM.

LEE
Shut up!

LILI
Okay, never have I ever had sex outdoors.

LIAM, SARAH and MATEO put down a finger each.

LIAM
 (trying to high five
 Mateo)
 Alright!

MATEO rolls his eyes and avoids his gesture.

SARAH
 Never have I ever owned a sex toy.

LEE and LILI look at each other, sharing a coy smile. They both put down a finger.

LILI
 (to Sarah)
 We really need to take you
 shopping.

The girls share a laugh. LIAM finishes his beer and swims over to grab another. It's LEE's turn.

LEE
 Never have I ever.. had a
 threesome.

The group collectively ooohh's, acknowledging the validity of the question.

LIAM
 (from the edge of the
 pool)
 What'd she say?

LEE, now fully drunk and invested in the game, giggles. She throws her head back, yelling into the night.

LEE
 Never have I ever had a threesome!

LIAM
 (teasing)
 Aw, Leebie. If you want me to set
 something up all you have to do is
 ask.

LIAM returns to the circle passing out fresh beers. He pops one open before resuming the game.

LIAM (CONT'D)
 Never have I ever had sex in a car.

RILEY, LEE, and SARAH all groan lowering a finger. RILEY and LEE make eye contact and LEE blushes in embarrassment.

SARAH
How did you make it through high school?

LIAM
You think my mom gave a fuck if I had girls over?

LIAM, LILI and LEE only have two fingers left. RILEY and MATEO have four. SARAH has three.

RILEY
Never have I ever..

He trails off thinking. A devious smirk comes to his face and he looks at LILI.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Never have I ever slept with both guys and girls.

The group oohhh's and waits for LILI's reaction.

MATEO
Come on, dude. That's not fair.

LILI slowly lowers her index finger, turning her last finger (her middle finger) around and confidently flipping RILEY off.

LILI
(calmly)
Jealous?

RILEY laughs and holds up his hands in defeat. The rest of the crew applauds LILI's response.

MATEO
(to LILI)
I got you.
(to RYLIE)
Never have I ever been in a band.

RYLIE moans and lowers a finger. He knows he deserved that. LIAM has to lower a finger as well.

LIAM
Mattie, you're killing me!

MATEO looks apologetically at LIAM and shrugs his shoulders. LIAM and LILI only have one finger left. RILEY and SARAH have three. MATEO has four and LEE has two.

LILI takes a long sip of her beer, thinking carefully about her next move.

LILI
Sorry Liam. Never have I ever had
sex in this pool.

The crew screams as LIAM lowers his final finger, defeated. They all laugh at the outcome.

SARAH
So exactly how many times have you
lost now Liam?

LIAM jumps towards SARAH. SARAH screams as LIAM grabs her. They begin play fighting. The others cheer and splash back.

LEE laughs at the commotion, but as the splashing intensifies she slowly inches away from the group. She rolls onto her back and lets her body float. The commotion continues around her unaffected. She stares up at the stars, completely dissociated from the world around her.

She closes her eyes and lets herself be carried away from the group. She sinks beneath the water and spends a moment on the bottom of the pool, meditatively. She swims back up to the surface. She has drifted to the other side of the pool by now. RILEY is sitting on the edge next to the case of beer waiting for her.

RILEY
Want one?

LEE nods and swims over to the edge. RILEY pops open a can and hands it to her. She hangs off the side and plays with the tab.

RILEY (CONT'D)
So how long are you in town for?

LEE
Two weeks.

There is a pause. RILEY sips his beer. Neither of them look directly at the other.

RILEY
I didn't know if I'd ever see you
again.

LEE
I know.

RILEY
I missed you.

LEE
I know.
(pause)
I missed you too.

The two finally make eye contact. Their eyes linger briefly.
RILEY laughs and takes a sip of his beer.

RILEY
Do you remember the last time we
came here together?

LEE
(smiling)
You fell trying to climb the gate.

RILEY
(mimicking her joking
tone)
You never let me forget that one
time.

They laugh together at the memory, slowly becoming more
comfortable with each other.

LEE
That was the first time we said I
love you.

RILEY
June 29.

LEE's eyes dart towards RILEY then straight back ahead. She's
flattered, but slightly unsettled that he remembers the exact
date. Their silence tainted by nostalgia, RILEY slips back
down into the water.

RILEY (CONT'D)
It really is good to see you Lee.

LEE
Yeah.

RILEY
And hey, congratulations on your
job. You're gunna kill it.

LEE
Thanks, Riley.

RILEY smiles at her and starts to swim back over to the group. LEE watches him go. She fiddles with the tab a bit more before accidentally breaking it off. She throws it to the side and puts the beer back in the box before pushing off from the wall towards her friends.

EXT. THE NEIGHBORHOOD POOL (NIGHT - LATER)

The crew sits along the pool deck in a row. They're all in various states of undress. They're quiet, coming down from all the excitement, happy to just be near each other again. A nearly asleep LILI rests her head on LEE's shoulder. LEE traces designs with her feet in the water zoned out.

The desert night is becoming cooler as the group sobers up. LEE shivers slightly. RILEY notices.

RILEY
(quietly, just for LEE)
You've got goosebumps.

Called back into the present, LEE realizes she is cold.

RILEY motions for LEE to come to him. LEE slowly pushes LILI off of her and leans her onto MATEO. LEE scoots back slowly until she's next to RILEY.

He puts his arm around her, rubbing her arm. LEE is a little tense. She looks at the rest of the group who are oblivious to RILEY and LEE. RILEY pulls her slowly closer and she gives in, releasing into his chest. They sit and stare out at the water, letting themselves enjoy the familiarity of the embrace.

INT. LEE'S BEDROOM THE NEXT DAY (MID-MORNING)

LEE lays on top of her bed. She's been awake for a few hours now and only PAUL is home. She gazes out the window, not really looking at anything, just enjoying the quiet. Hanging from her window are a collection of objects tied with colored string. She runs her fingers through them.

The doorbell rings, but she doesn't flinch. A few moments later it rings again. This time she hears PAUL's footsteps. He opens the door and she hears a muffled exchange of words.

PAUL
(from the other room)
Lee someone at the door for you!

LEE turns her head towards the other room, slightly confused before slowly rising from the bed and padding into the front room.

INT. LEE'S HOUSE FRONT ROOM (MID-MORNING SAME DAY)

LEE enters into PAUL and RILEY's conversation, but stops a few steps behind them.

RILEY
They're doing well. Mom still loves
a good party.

PAUL
(chuckling)
You should have seen her in high
school.

RILEY
You know they'd love to see you.
Peter and Olivia too.

PAUL
Yeah, we'll set something up.

PAUL turns to see where LEE is. RILEY peeks out behind him.

RILEY
Hey Leebie. You left your sweater
last night.

PAUL gives LEE a questioning look. LEE ignores him and finally comes forward into the conversation space. RILEY hands her a thin cardigan.

LEE
You didn't have to bring it all the
way over.

RILEY
Don't worry about it. I thought we
could maybe go for a walk?

LEE
Uhm. Yeah sure. Let me grab some
shoes.

LEE walks back to her bedroom. PAUL and RILEY watch as she leaves the room.

INT. LEE'S BEDROOM

LEE looks down at the sweater, the object that forced last night into the sunlight of today. She sets it on her dresser and grabs a pair of shoes from her closet. She slips them on and catches her reflection in the full length mirror in the corner of her room.

She stops and stands still, looking at her reflection. She walks slowly up the mirror until she is only inches from its surface. She stares intently into her reflected eyes, searching.

EXT. THE NEIGHBORHOOD (SAME DAY)

LEE and RILEY walk slowly side by side on the sidewalk. This neighborhood is nice, but definitely not cookie cutter. Each house has a lot of character. It's a hot, bright summer day and people are out and about. Some sit on their porches or water plants, kids play in yards. Everyone seems to watch them as they pass silently, but the two are oblivious to their following eyes.

They walk without speaking for quite some time, each of them looking straight ahead. RILEY leaving the space open for LEE to talk when she's ready. Eventually she is.

LEE
How's the band?

RILEY
Great. We've got a few local shows lined up. A few maybes. We're working our way up.

LEE nods, but doesn't respond so RILEY continues.

RILEY (CONT'D)
I feel like we have to get somewhere eventually. We've put in our time you know?

LEE still doesn't respond, but RILEY doesn't take offense. They walk a bit more in silence.

RILEY (CONT'D)
So New York, huh?

LEE
Yeah.

RILEY
You must be excited. You're finally
doing what you've always wanted.

LEE
Do you think people ever really
know what they want?

RILEY
(looking at LEE now)
I do.

They come to the neighborhood park. There's a birthday party going on. There's cake and a little girl is dressed up like a princess. She runs around squealing with her friends. The parents, mostly women, sit at picnic tables chatting. A colorful pinata hangs from a tree.

LEE and RILEY walk past the celebration and head for the swings. They take off their shoes and place them next to each other at the edge of the sand pit before each taking a swing.

LEE
I used to come here at night.
Especially in the summer. I'd lay
out on the tennis court. The sun
warms it all day and at night I
would let it seep into my skin.

RILEY
I remember.

LEE
It's funny how people get tied up
in places. In memory you know.
You're in this park, the pool, the
desert.

RILEY
Both of us are.

They rock in their swings quietly. Each thinking. LEE watches as the birthday party on the other side of the park progresses. They're getting ready to hit the pinata. The birthday girl's father ties a blindfold over her eyes before spinning her three times around.

RILEY walks over behind LEE and starts pushing her gently. LEE picks up her feet and lets him.

LEE
How's Alex?

RILEY
He's doing good. He's in California
now. I'm hoping to make it up there
sometime this summer.

LEE
I was always jealous of you guys. I
wanted siblings growing up.

RILEY
(playfully)
Solitude suits you.

LEE smiles. On the other side of the park the kids continue
to scream and jump around as one after another tries to hit
the pinata.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Everyone really loved seeing you
last night.

LEE
It felt good. Like everything was
back the way it used to be.

RILEY
What if we did?

LEE
Did what?

The pinata cracks open, showering candy down on the kids.
They scream with excitement and all scramble to the ground to
collect pieces out of the grass. RILEY stops pushing and LEE
slowly comes to a stop.

RILEY
What if we went back to how things
were. How we used to be.
(pause)
At least until you leave?

LEE digs her heels into the sand, coming to a complete stop.
Her eyes focus on something far away; intensely, absently.

One of the party kids falls in the scramble for candy and
starts crying. She sits there wailing while everyone else
runs around her.

LEE
Okay.

RILEY is caught off guard by her response, but also thrilled.

RILEY

Okay.

TRANSITION: THE OLD TRAILERS OUT AT RILEY'S RANCH

EXT. THE STEPS OF THE HIGH SCHOOL (THAT NIGHT)

The group lounges on the stairs of their former high school, nestled between archaic Greco-Roman columns. It's fairly late. The steps overlook the school's football field, as well as much of the cities of El Paso and Juarez, Mexico. The mountains are outlined faintly in the dark. The view allows a panoramic of glowing lights. One line of lights cuts sharply through the rest - the border.

The group is already drunk. They have a few six packs of beer laying around and a bottle of rum that they pass amongst themselves. RILEY and LEE sit next to each other, but don't touch.

MATEO

God, no matter where I go, there's
not much that can beat this view.

The group agrees quietly in unison. They're feeling more introspective and quiet tonight.

LIAM finishes rolling a joint and lights it, taking a couple deep hits before passing it to RILEY. The joint is passed around the circle (except MATEO) as they talk - the conversation is unrushed, their words not addressed to anyone in particular.

LIAM

(exhaling the smoke)
It's weird it's only been four
years.

SARAH

If only we had known how much
easier high school was than real
life.

MATEO

High school was real life.

SARAH

You know what I mean.

LILI
It's funny. When we were in school
we all hated the city, but once we
left we couldn't stopped thinking
about it.

LIAM
Some of us never left.

They sit looking at the lights for a moment. SARAH pulls out
her cigarettes and a deck of tarot cards. She lights a
cigarette before sliding the cards out of their box.

SARAH
Ready?

Everyone gets quiet. They settle into the stone. MATEO looks
uncomfortable. Sarah begins shuffling the cards rhythmically.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Who should we do tonight?

LIAM
I think it's Mattie's turn.

MATEO
(shaking his head)
Nah man. You know that shit creeps
me out. No offense SARAH.

SARAH raises her hands to show she doesn't care.

LIAM
I'll go.

SARAH
Anything specific on your mind?

LIAM
Just the usual.

SARAH nods. She's read all their cards many times before. She
takes the deck and lays six cards out face down. She turns
over the first one - it's the world.

SARAH
You feel satisfied with your life.
You've recently been rewarded for
your hard work and fulfillment is
in your near future.

LIAM looks excitedly towards RILEY - it's obviously about the
band. RILEY nods in acknowledgement.

SARAH turns over the second card - the sun.

SARAH (CONT'D)
What you crave most is to be content. You've recently endured a long period of challenges, but a peaceful rest and a chance for good news will soon present itself.

LIAM nods - happy with his reading so far. SARAH turns over the third card - the hermit.

SARAH (CONT'D)
You fear being alone. Take time to meditate on your questions before rushing to find an answer.

LIAM becomes more serious - at this moment he really believes in this. SARAH turns over the fourth card - strength - SARAH and LIAM smile - this card appears regularly for him.

SARAH (CONT'D)
You know this one. Your continued confidence and courage will help guide you through the struggle that weighs on your mind.

SARAH turns over the fifth card - the hierophant.

SARAH (CONT'D)
You struggle to adhere to the expectations of others. Focus inward to find who you really are.

LIAM takes this card in solemnly. SARAH turns over the last card - the star - this seems to calm LIAM.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(casually to LIAM)
This is a good omen for you.
(she returns to her spiritual tone)
You will experience good luck and opportunity soon. Accept gifts and take a chance on something new.

LIAM smiles - feeling relieved.

LIAM
I knew it!

SARAH collects the cards and shuffles them back together.

SARAH
Your reading was strong tonight.
Looks like something good might be
coming your way.

LIAM and RILEY exchange looks and smile.

LIAM
(to RILEY)
I told you we're close. I wouldn't
be surprised if we got signed by
the end of the year!

RILEY smiles hopefully, assured. MATEO shakes his head
skeptically, but doesn't say anything.

SARAH
(to MATEO)
You sure you don't wanna give it a
try?

MATEO
I'm good. I know what my future
looks like.

LEE
(quietly)
I'll go.

SARAH looks surprised at LEE. She finishes shuffling the
cards and chooses six.

SARAH
It's been a while since I read your
cards.

LEE moves down to sit next to SARAH. She takes a deep
breathe, preparing. SARAH turns over the first card - the
tower.

SARAH (CONT'D)
You're in the midst of a big
transition and feel uncertain about
the outcome. You may think you want
change, but remember there are
always other paths you can take.

LEE is serious - her brow furrowed as she takes in the cards.
Everyone else is focused intently on what the cards might
tell them about her. SARAH flips over the second card -
temperance.

SARAH (CONT'D)
 You're searching for balance. Let
 go and trust that your sense of
 control will return.

SARAH turns over the third card - lovers.

SARAH (CONT'D)
 You let fear guide you. Trust in
 yourself to conquer your fears and
 let happiness find you through the
 renewal of lost relationships.

LEE looks up questioningly at SARAH. SARAH quickly averts her
 eyes. Everyone seems to be holding their breathe, waiting.
 SARAH turns over the fourth card - the sun - she's relieved
 that the reading is becoming more positive.

SARAH (CONT'D)
 The time is ripe for your success
 and happiness. Spend this time in
 celebration with loved ones and be
 kind to yourself.

SARAH smiles at LEE before turning over the next card - the
 devil. LILI watches LEE intensely and SARAH's smile drops.
 LEE looks expectantly, nervously at SARAH.

SARAH (CONT'D)
 (uncomfortably)
 Something sinister is working
 against you. It tries to drag you
 into its haze. Take caution as
 simple pleasures will lead to deep
 addictions. This path does not lead
 to good things.

LEE stares at the evil card. Everyone fidgets awkwardly.
 SARAH reaches out and lays a hand on LEE's leg.

SARAH (CONT'D)
 We can stop.

LEE
 No it's okay.

SARAH returns to the cards and flips over the last one - the
 high priestess.

SARAH
 This is good Leebie. You may not
 feel self-assured, but your
 intuition is sharp.
 (MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)
Be still, listen carefully, and
trust in your decisions, even if
they're not the ones you expected
yourself to make.

SARAH has regained her composure - everything will be okay.
She collects the cards.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Maybe that's enough for tonight.

Everyone else nods - they don't want to push their luck. Even
MATEO is unsettled. RILEY pulls LEE up next to him. LEE's
gaze is unfocused, she's deep inside her head. LIAM tries to
regain control of the situation.

LIAM
(holding up the bottle of
rum)
Let's finish this and head in.

LEE
Inside?

LEE looks around the group, confused.

LILI
(mischievously)
I've still got my key. Apparently
they never changed the locks.

RILEY moves closer to her and takes her hand as the bottle is
passed around.

RILEY
(quietly to LEE)
I wanted to surprise you.

Before LEE can respond SARAH passes the bottle to her,
interrupting RILEY and LEE's private moment. She takes a sip
robotically and hands it to RILEY. He smiles and quickly
takes a big swig, finishing the bottle.

RILEY pulls LEE up and they all file behind LILI who floats
towards the door. She opens it with little effort. The group
quietly enters into the trophy case room. They stay close
together and talk in whispers as if they were in a museum.

A taxidermied tiger poses in a glass box in the center of the
room. It's muscles tense, the animal positions itself for
attack.

The group moves past photographs from each class before them, before reaching their own. RILEY pulls LEE over and points to the case.

RILEY (CONT'D)

There we are.

The group leaves the trophy room. RILEY leads LEE by the hand. She turns and looks back one more time at the room of memorabilia, illuminated by moonlight.

INT. THE HIGH SCHOOL THEATER (SAME NIGHT)

LILI stands in the sound booth at the top of the balcony. The theater is dark besides the light behind the glass panels of the boxy room. She fiddles with the various machines and sound boards. She finds the knob for the stage lights and slowly the stage floods with overhead red, gelled light.

The spotlights create cone-like halos across the empty stage. The group walks slowly, purposefully down the aisle. Single file they climb the stairs to the stage. RILEY gives LEE a hand and doesn't let go.

The group moves trance-like around the stage silently. Dust falls through the light. RILEY and LEE exchange a glance and smile.

No one speaks. The space is sacred. No, not just the space - the way it exists in both real time and memory, the lights, the exact day and hour, the way time slips slower here, the way they feel as they breathe in each dusty, red cloud.

The speakers crackle. LEE looks up at the sound booth where LILI is still messing with equipment. Finally she finds what she's looking for. A song begins to play through the sound system, quietly at first. LILI slowly increases the volume filling the auditorium with pulsing music. (something like Lady by Chromatics)

The group sways to the music, each in their own world. Their movements are barely visible at first, but become bigger as the music swells. They dance as if in a trance, letting their limbs explore their own movements in space. Time has slowed down. They twist their wrists and let their heads roll. They let themselves exist within the music.

The lights change colors with the music, flashing blues, greens, yellows, reds. Mixing and running together as the bodies below move in and out of their glow.

LILI emerges from the darkness up the steps to the stage. LEE focuses her movements towards her, moving her body solemnly as if reciting a forgotten poem. LEE holds out her arm. Her face is serious - this moment is real life. LILI, equally serious walks slowly towards LEE. The two grasp hands and begin to move together, eyes closed.

LILI, LEE, RILEY, SARAH, MATEO, they all slip in and out of each other, their bodies duplicating and disappearing without motive, lost in the collective experience.

RILEY gently pulls LEE to him. Her eyes flutter open. He wraps his arms around her. They move together, tangled up in each other. Her head rolls back as she exhales. RILEY pulls her closer and she rests her head on his chest. Her eyes stare at something far from here.

RILEY takes LEE's hand and leads her towards the stairs. They begin to slip down into the darkness of the theater.

MONTAGE (UNRESTRAINED BY TIME, MUSIC FROM THE THEATER CARRIES THROUGH):

INT. THE HIGH SCHOOL THEATER

RILEY and LEE are swallowed by the darkness. The rest of the group continues dancing, oblivious of any change.

INT. RILEY'S BEDROOM

THE room is fairly empty. There's a mosaic of posters and photos on the wall, but not much furniture. A mattress and box springs sit flat on the ground. The bed is angled and missing sheets and pillows. A circular canopy hangs from the ceiling above the bed. It's white fabric is tied up out of the way.

It's dark. Soft light filters in the window from the bright summer moon.

SARAH leans down to light a candle. It's only one of dozens that clutter most of the empty surfaces in the room. MATEO helps her. They move carefully, ceremoniously. They use long white candles to light the others and cup the flame protectively.

LILI airs out a clean, white bed sheet. It flutters slower than usual back down to her.

No one speaks. They are serious, focused on their tasks.

INT. THE HIGH SCHOOL THEATER

LILI, SARAH, MATEO, LIAM dance, their movements becoming more and more bizarre as they lose themselves to music. They blur in and out of focus.

RILEY leads LEE through the dark theater aisle. They move like they were in water, their limbs heavy.

INT. RILEY'S BEDROOM

LILI and LIAM each hold a side of a white, down duvet. They carefully bring the comforter down to the bed's level, kneeling as they go.

INT. THE HIGH SCHOOL THEATER

RILEY and LEE continue through the dark. The aisle is never ending.

Faint colored lights glow far behind them.

INT. RILEY'S BEDROOM

MATEO is gone. Almost all the candles are lit, providing the sole source of flickering light in the room. LIAM takes care of the last few. Wax drips down his hands.

INT. THE HIGH SCHOOL THEATER

The colored lights spin overhead. Their bodies become shapes, return to bodies, slip back again.

INT. RILEY'S BEDROOM

LILI and SARAH move along opposite sides of the bed in perfect unison, smoothing out the sheets on last time.

They release the canopy, allowing the gauzy fabric to engulf the bed. They pull the individual pieces of fabric apart, fanning them out like the train of a gown.

INT. RILEY'S BEDROOM (CONTINUED)

RILEY leads LEE towards the canopied bed. The candles are all ablaze. They are the only ones in the room.

INT. THE HIGH SCHOOL THEATER

LILI, LIAM, SARAH, and MATEO. Their movements become more contained. Heads and shoulders roll gracefully, backs arch giving each vertebrae the chance to sigh. Most of them have their eyes closed. Their movements are more meditative now as they allow themselves to breathe into every fiber of their being. They blur together into color, slip farther and farther away into the dark.

INT. RILEY'S BEDROOM

RILEY and LEE stand facing each other, slowly undressing. They keep eye contact as they peel away their clothing.

They fall through the gauze onto the bed. The canopy closes behind them, swallowing their naked bodies.

RILEY rests himself above LEE. He brushes a strand of her hair back before kissing her. They are isolated by their white fortress. Ghostly yellow orbs of candle light flicker through the thin fabric that surrounds them.

RILEY
Are you sure?

LEE nods solemnly. RILEY begins really kissing her now. He gently pushes into her. His body eclipses hers below.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Is this okay?

LEE
Yeah.

She rolls her head to the side inhaling deeply, sensually, her eyes closed. As RILEY continues moving above her, her eyes open - detached and listless. She stares off to the side as RILEY begins moving faster and more enthusiastically above her.

INT. RILEY'S BEDROOM (LATER THAT NIGHT)

RILEY and LEE lie on their backs, wrapped in the billowy white duvet. Their bodies are intertwined. They whisper in hushed voices.

RILEY
Did you finish?

LEE
No.

The veiled bed hovers: a solitary island, surrounded by a sea of unlit candles. Consumed and depleted - the drips of wax not quite hardened, the blackened wicks reduced to stubs.

INT. ARDOVINO'S DESERT CROSSING RESTAURANT (MID-MORNING)

LEE, PAUL, and OLIVIA sit around a large, rectangular table in the center of the dining room. There a few scattered tables along the sides of the wall, giving them relative privacy. The table is perfect - pressed white tablecloth, simple centerpiece arrangement, antique silver dining wear.

The family is dressed nicely. They are here to celebrate LEE. A white napkin is carefully folded in each of their laps. There is a large window behind them, showing a glimpse of empty desert. They've already ordered, but the table is still empty in front of them.

PETER moves around the table, filling each person's champagne glass with mimosa from a large glass pitcher. He skips over PAUL, walking without hesitation around him back to his seat. PETER remains standing to pour his own glass before settling back into his seat, replacing the pitcher in the center of the table. PAUL looks at PETER. PETER instinctually knows - the silent conversation is habit.

PETER

We've been over this.

PAUL remains silent.

PETER (CONT'D)

This is nice. Getting everyone dressed up and out of the house for the morning.

PETER (CONT'D)

(to LEE)

You know your mom and I have been so busy lately I don't think we've been here since the last time you were in town.

LEE

That's too bad.

PETER

Yeah. It really is something out here.

PETER (CONT'D)

You know Leebie, your mom and I are so proud of you.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

To see you doing what you're meant to do, always moving towards something bigger and better. It's incredible.

PAUL puts his arm around LEE's shoulder. The two exchange a private smile.

PETER (CONT'D)

Really. I mean, I know you've had your fair share of struggles, but this new opportunity that you've created for yourself is really something to take pride in.

OLIVIA

Shall we toast?

OLIVIA, LEE, and PETER pick up their champagne flutes. PAUL reaches for his glass of water.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

(warmly, performatively to the table)

To living vicariously through Leebie. May you live out every dream we ever had.

PETER

To LEE as she begins her new life. I know that this chapter can only be better and brighter than the last.

PAUL

(sarcastically)

Long live the queen.

LEE smiles. Both her parents have their eyes set on her. They bring their glasses to the center and cheers. PETER, OLIVIA, and LEE take sips of their mimosas. PETER replaces his full glass over the water ring from the sweating glass on the table cloth.

PETER

So, what's the first thing you're gunna do when you get to New York?

LEE

Uhm. I don't know. After driving so long I'll probably just want to sleep.

PETER

Are you sure you don't want me to drive up there with you?

LEE

No, I'll be fine.

PETER

We could trade off driving so you could sleep some. And company might not be a bad idea for such a long road trip.

LEE

Really dad, it's okay. I have plenty of new music to listen to, I know how to change a tire. Plus that would be a huge pain for you to take off work.

PETER

Oh don't worry about that. If you feel you need me to come I'm sure I can make it work. We have some airline miles saved up so I could help you set up your new place and then catch a flight back. I probably wouldn't even need to be gone for more than four or five days.

LEE

I really appreciate it dad, but I promise I'll be fine. I feel like I should do this on my own anyways.

OLIVIA

Oh honey, you don't have to do that. Your dad and I, and PAUL, we'll always be there.

LEE

No I know, I just.. I don't know, I feel like if I don't do it alone it won't be real.

PETER and OLIVIA both look as if they want to continue this circular discussion, but PAUL jumps in instead.

PAUL

Well, listen she's here for another week so.. just think about it.

LEE
Yeah.

PETER
Just let me know when you decide.

Their food arrives - a tastefully plated brunch. The waiters disappear as soon as everything has been laid out.

PETER (CONT'D)
Wow, this looks delicious.

Everyone admires their food and begins to prepare for the meal - adding seasoning, pouring syrup, cutting things up.

PETER (CONT'D)
LEE, before we eat, your mom and I
have something to give you.

The focus is turned from the food to OLIVIA who pulls out a small box from her purse. She hands it to LEE, smiling.

LEE takes it, surprised. She turns the small object around in her hands, inspecting it.

PETER (CONT'D)
Go ahead. Open it.

LEE pulls at the end of the string tied around the box and the knot slips away. She opens it carefully. It's one of those jewelry boxes that are lined with plush cotton. Nestled inside are two small spools wound with black tape. LEE looks up at PETER confused.

PETER (CONT'D)
That there is a typewriter ribbon.
And sitting at home waiting for you
is the actual typewriter.

OLIVIA
(enamored by the romantic
idea)
For you to write the stories that
live deepest inside you.

LEE
(softly)
Thank you.

PETER
Did you know that every typewriter
has its own unique typeface? I read
it just the other day.
(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
Who knows maybe someday someone
will trace the words back to you.

LEE picks up the ribbon and inspects it.

OLIVIA
Every method of writing is
different, you know. You wouldn't
feel the same writing by hand as
you would typing on a computer.
(pause)
That's what makes the typewriter so
special. It's the most intimate.
You can't be shy with yourself when
you write on a typewriter.

PETER
Take care of that thing and it'll
last you forever.

LEE returns the ribbon to its place in the box and closes the
top. She finally meets her parents' expectant looks.

PETER (CONT'D)
Do you like it?

LEE
Yeah. It's great. Thank you guys.

OLIVIA and PETER smile, happy with their success. They share
a quick kiss.

PETER
Alright, I'm done now. Let's eat.

OLIVIA, PETER, and PAUL chuckle and nod in agreement before
digging in. LEE stands up.

LEE
I'm just gunna run wash my hands.

LEE turns and leaves her untouched plate. The rest of the
family continues to eat, carrying on a light chatter as LEE
walks out of the restaurant.

EXT. ARDOVINO'S DESERT CROSSING RESTAURANT (DAY)

LEE sits on an outside, secluded patio. She stares out at the
wild expanse of desert. Immediately to her left are the
mountains. Behind them is Mexico. A black line runs into the
distance separating the two. To her right is sand, in the
distance an amusement park, and farther back still, more
mountains.

The landscape around her is so open, so big. The heat settles still in the air.

She sits like this for a while, still, listening to the distance.

PAUL walks up behind her. He stands for a moment looking out before taking a seat next to her. Neither one looks at the other. They sit quietly for a few moments.

LEE
(without looking at PAUL,
more a statement than a
question)
What if I don't have a story?

PAUL looks at her without responding. She continues to look forward as she continues.

LEE (CONT'D)
I mean, what if I have to live my
whole life to realize that I never
had any words hidden inside me?
(pause)
What happens then? When you make it
to the end and realize you're just
as tangled as before.

Exhausted by her own words, LEE settles back into the silence. PAUL lets his gaze linger on her for a few more moments before turning his eyes out again towards the desert.

PAUL
Do you remember when you found me?
On the bathroom floor. Grandma's
house.
(pause)
That's what people here see when
they look at me. They whisper and
make up their own stories. I don't
think anyone knows what's real
anymore.
(pause)
You know your dad calls my
therapist after each of my
appointments. I guess patient
confidentiality doesn't apply when
you're on suicide watch.

They each keep their eyes forward, they don't need to look at each other to understand. PAUL continues to talk to the desert.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 I didn't even mean to do it. Or
 maybe I did, I don't even know
 anymore. Either way, the only story
 I'm allowed is the one where my
 niece finds me crumpled on the
 bathroom floor. Where your dad has
 to leave his own mother's wake to
 ride in an ambulance with the
 brother she never loved. As long as
 I stay here, that's the only story
 left.

PAUL collects himself in silence. LEE stares at his hard
 profile. He turns to meet her gaze.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 The past is dangerous, LEE. It's
 never what it looks like.

LEE rests her head against PAUL's shoulder. The desert's
 expansiveness is both beautiful and foreboding.

TRANSITION: DOWNTOWN B-ROLL

INT. BOOMTOWN (NIGHT)

The group hangs in the back of a divey bar by the dart board,
 drinking Mexican beer. LILI and SARAH sit together at a table
 talking and watching everyone else play. It's RILEY and LEE
 against LIAM and MATEO. RILEY and LEE are winning.

The bar is dim, most of the light comes from old neon bulbs,
 spun around the room by a low hanging disco ball.

The bar is filled with people singing karaoke and others
 cheering them on. Everyone in the bar is fairly drunk and
 having a good time. Only a few stragglers sit alone at the
 bar.

It's MATEO's turn. RILEY and LEE pay him no attention as he
 sets up his shot. RILEY has her backed up against the table.
 Their faces almost touch as they whisper to each other - they
 look like they're planning something devious.

MATEO finishes his turn. RILEY and LEE are oblivious to the
 game.

LIAM
 Hey lovebirds, last round!

They hear him, but take their time returning to the group. RILEY finally turns around, slowly sauntering to his place and setting up his shot. LIAM and MATEO roll their eyes. RILEY shoots, but not well.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Impressive.

RILEY
(shrugging his shoulders)
Still winning.

He backs up as LIAM sets up for his turn, putting out his arm for LEE. She comes over and nestles back into him. They watch LIAM take his shot together, it's pretty good.

It's LEE's turn. She smiles and walks confidently to her mark. She takes her time. She grabs a dart and runs the tip across the palm of her hand before raising it to eye level. She throws it quickly and it lands with a thud. It's good enough for them to win.

LEE returns to RILEY. He's proud of her.

MATEO
Rematch?

RILEY
I say it's time for karaoke.

There is a mixed reaction from the group. LEE, LIAM, and SARAH want to, but MATEO and LILI are less enthusiastic.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Winner's choice. I'll go get us on the list.

RILEY takes off towards the karaoke.

LEE
Anyone need another drink?

LIAM
If you're offering.

SARAH
I'll take one.

LEE heads towards the bar, while LILI, SARAH, and LIAM move to join RILEY and choose their songs. MATEO hangs back from the group and follows after LEE.

It's loud and LEE has to wave to get the bartender's attention.

LEE
Four beers.

The bartender nods and walks away.

MATEO
(a little awkwardly)
Hey. You know I'm heading back tomorrow, and I just wanted to know before I left if you're okay.

LEE
(not understanding)
Yeah I'm great. Gunna miss you though, Mattie.

MATEO
(rethinking his words)
Yeah. What I meant though LEE, is are you okay. I mean really okay.

LEE
(picking up on his seriousness)
I'm fine, Mattie.

MATEO
It's just, none of us saw you for years and all of a sudden you're back and it's just like it used to be and that's great, but now you're back with RILEY and..
(pause)
I don't know LEE.

LEE
(defensively)
So you're all allowed to play like we're in high school, but I'm not? Why? Because I left or because I came back?

MATEO
Come on, LEE be serious. We don't get to just fuck around anymore.
(losing steam)
All I'm saying is you and RILEY aren't good for each other.

LEE
(a little coldly)
Thanks for the advice.

LEE takes two of the four beers that the bartender set in front of them while they talked. She turns and walks back to the group. MATEO follows a few steps behind her.

They hand out the beers as the karaoke announcer comes on.

ANNOUNCER

Alllllright. It looks like next up
we have RILEY BIDWELL. RILEY
BIDWELL please come to the stage.

The crowd claps. The group cheers. RILEY jumps up the stage picking up a microphone on the way. He's in full performance mode now.

RILEY

Thank you. This one's for LEE
WALLACE.

LEE blushes. LILI gives her a playful push and the group cheers. RILEY takes his place as his song begins to play over the old speaker system. The crowd moves to the music as RILEY starts to sing. He's playing to the crowd. He sings to LEE. On anyone else it would be silly, but RILEY is so committed.

As the song continues, LEE gradually becomes less and less disillusioned. RILEY's performance loses its charm. It's so derogative, such practiced spontaneity. Her face falls as she thinks about her conversation with MATEO. For the first time she begins questioning her decisions. She tries to shut her analytical brain off, but her doubts come crowding in. The music is too loud, the ceiling too low. She can't take it.

Putting on a calm exterior, she pushes through the crowd towards the exit. LILI watches as she goes.

EXT. BOOMTOWN (NIGHT)

LEE leaves through the back exit. Outside is a small, empty patio facing the parking lot. She slides down the wall and sits on the ground. She takes a sip of beer, puts it down, pulls out a pack of cigarettes. She lights one and takes a few deep breathes. She realizes she doesn't want to smoke. Frustrated she throws the barely smoked cigarette into her beer.

She presses on her forehead with the heels of her hands. She slides her hands through her hair and tries to settle herself down. The door to the bar opens leaking music and light. It's LILI. She walks over sits next to LEE.

LILI

Hey. You okay?

LEE
Yeah. Just needed some fresh air.

LILI
Same.
(pause)
How're things with RILEY?

LEE
(exhaling)
I have no idea what I'm doing.

LILI nods, understanding.

LEE (CONT'D)
Have you heard back about the
fellowship yet?

LILI
No. Should be soon though.

LEE
What'll you do? I mean if things
don't work out.

LILI
I don't have a safety.
(pause)
I guess I'd have to move back in
with my parents for a bit. I really
don't know if I could do it though.
(shaking her head)
I just.. I can't go back to hiding.

LEE
They still don't know?

LILI
It would kill them.

LEE
They're your parents LILI.

LILI
There's no room for a gay daughter
in that world.

LILI (CONT'D)
(sighing, she speaks
haltingly)
Sometimes I feel like there's no
room for any of us. We grow up
being told we can be whatever we
want. Over and over.
(MORE)

LILI (CONT'D)

Then all of a sudden people start telling you to take what you can get. Your job after college won't be your dream job. You might never get your dream job. But that's okay. Take what you can get and be happy with it. So we all end up in the real world wondering when the adults changed the rules. Because this isn't the life they told us about. In the end, we're all left wishing for the world they promised us as kids.

They sit quietly for a while, each thinking their own thoughts.

LEE

I've been thinking a lot lately. About leaving, starting over again, reliving the same pattern of learning and forgetting. Trying to figure out what it is I want.

(pause, she needs to work up the courage to open up)

What I want most is to see myself through my own eyes and know that I exist.

LEE turns to LILI. LILI meets her gaze. LEE brushes a strand of hair behind LILI's ear. She leans in, pulling LILI towards her. LEE kisses her. She waits a moment, looks at LILI before kissing her again. This time LILI kisses her back. The moment swells. It almost feels right.

Abruptly, LILI pulls away, shaking her head. She's upset, but calm - her face tinged with disappointment.

LILI

I can't do this again, LEE.

(pause)

This is real for me. You don't get to take that.

LIAM bursts through the door. He looks around finding LEE and LILI.

LIAM

LEE, it's your song!

Something has broken through to LEE. Her face has fallen. She turns to LILI.

LEE
You're right.

LEE stands up leaving LILI sitting alone. She walks through the door LIAM has been holding open, back into the bar. She moves through the crowd, making her way to the stage. She grabs the microphone. The crowd yells, but she doesn't seem to hear. The lights are bright on her. A karaoke version of Corvette by Shannon and the Clams begins to play.

She stands still, gripping the microphone. She starts the song, unfeeling, a bit flat.

LEE (CONT'D)
(singing)
You picked me up in your Corvette
Although I wasn't ready yet
I loved the leather on my buns
My God, we are the lucky ones
But this never was real
Though I swear I can feel
The engine revving so loud

LEE (CONT'D)
(gaining emotion and
confidence)
I'm just waiting here
Here on the corner here
For our Corvette that never comes

Colored overhead lights spin across her face. She's in her own world now. Somewhere far removed from the stage. She loosens up a bit. We circle her, the crowd sways.

LEE (CONT'D)
We cruised for years in that
Corvette, Been speeding since the
day we met, Grippped leather gloves
point towards the sun, Always
escaping from the dawn.

LEE reaches the breaking point. Her voice gets louder, desperate. Everything else fades away. All that matters are the words.

LEE (CONT'D)
But this never was real
Though I swear I can feel
The engine revving so loud

Her voice verges on breaking.

LEE (CONT'D)
 I'm just waiting here
 Here on the corner here
 For our Corvette that never comes

As she ends the song, her voice is still desperate but gradually becomes softer. The last line is almost spoken.

LEE (CONT'D)
 I'm just waiting here
 Here on the corner here
 For our Corvette that never comes

The song ends. It's silent. There are tears in her eyes. She holds tightly to the microphone. One drop rolls down her cheek.

TRANSITION: SHOTS OF EMPTY LOCATIONS AROUND THE CITY: EMPTY STREETS, CLOSED AMUSEMENT PARK, ETC.

EXT. RENTAL HOUSE - A DIFFERENT ONE FROM THE BEGINNING (DAY)

LEE walks up to the door of a white and brick colonial. The yard is well manicured. There's a FOR SALE sign by the curb with OLIVIA's smiling face on it. LEE carries a to-go bag of food. She reaches the door and leans down, lifting the welcome mat to grab the key. She opens the door, replaces the key and walks inside.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE (DAY)

LEE walks through the house to the kitchen. The interior is pristine and clearly staged. No one lives in a house so perfect. She sets the bag down in the kitchen.

LEE
 (calling out)
 Mom?

There's no reply. She takes two boxes of food out of the bag and sets them on the counter. She walks to the cabinets and begins opening drawers and doors at random. It takes her a few tries to find the dishes. She pulls out two plates and two glasses and puts them on the table by the food. She returns to the cabinets. Carefully she surveys the layout of the drawers. She decides on a drawer by the sink and lays her fingers on the knob. She pulls the drawer out a few inches peeking inside. She guessed right. She smiles to herself as she opens the drawer the rest of the way and pulls out two forks.

LEE (CONT'D)
 (voice raised)
 Food's here!

Still there's no answer. LEE opens one of the boxes. She turns her head to listen for OLIVIA's footsteps. Hearing nothing, she closes the box back up and leaves the kitchen, making her way through the unfamiliar house.

LEE (CONT'D)
 Mom?

She passes through each empty room, peeking around corners, trailing her fingers along the molding on the walls. As she moves deeper into the house she begins to hear faint music. She follows the sound ending at a closed door. The music floats through the wall. It sounds old.

LEE opens the door slowly, peeking her head around the corner.

LEE (CONT'D)
 Mom?

She enters the room. OLIVIA is laying on top of a made bed. She sits up and smiles as she hears LEE come in. She reaches over and pulls the needle up from a record player next to the bed. The record continues spinning, even though it no longer produces any sound.

LEE (CONT'D)
 I was looking for you.

OLIVIA
 Sorry, I got distracted and didn't hear you come in. Come feel this bed. It's like a cloud.

LEE walks over and climbs onto the bed next to OLIVIA. She sighs loudly as she sinks into the bed next to her mom.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
 Nice, huh?

LEE
 I can see why you didn't want to get up. Do you think they'd notice if we switched the mattress with my old one?

OLIVIA
 (laughing)
 If anyone's getting a new mattress it's me.

OLIVIA rolls onto her side so that she's facing LEE. She brushes a piece of hair away from LEE's face.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
What have you been getting into today?

LEE
Not much. I went through the box of clothes I left here last winter. Hung out with PAUL for a bit.
(pause)
I dropped some old stuff off at Goodwill on the way over.

OLIVIA
What'd you and PAUL do?

LEE
Just messed around. Played with some ideas for his class.
(pause)
I wish he could have taught while I was still in high school.

OLIVIA
(brushing past LEE's last comment)
It's lucky your dad was able to get him the job. From what I've heard the kids all love him.

LEE
I bet. How'd your showing go this morning?

OLIVIA
It was good. Newlyweds looking to start a family. The woman had on great heels.

LEE
What color?

OLIVIA
Light grey suede with leather ankle straps.

LEE oohs in admiration.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
They loved the kitchen except for the cabinets, which they wanted to be white.
(MORE)

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
I don't know why they made such a big fuss about it. I told them they could just repaint. A can of paint costs what.. like twenty dollars?

LEE
(chuckling)
Do you have anyone else coming today?

OLIVIA
There should be another couple coming by around three. Family of five. They're looking for more space and want to be closer to schools for the kids.

LEE nods. She enjoys hearing about the people her mom shows around. She wonders if they have any idea that their realtor occasionally eats, drinks, and sleeps in the houses as if they were her own.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
Have you started packing yet?

LEE
Not yet. It won't take me long though.

OLIVIA
You're leaving Saturday right?

LEE
Yeah in the morning.

OLIVIA
And I'm assuming you haven't changed your mind about having your dad go with you?

LEE
I think I should go on my own.

OLIVIA
I figured. I'll talk to him.
(pause)
Are you nervous?

LEE
A little.

OLIVIA
It's okay to be scared. It's a big transition.

LEE

Yeah.

OLIVIA

You're a lot like me you know. The Plath girls are notoriously bad at leaving and even worse at coming back.

LEE

It's just a lot. There are gunna be so many things in New York and so many things from college and even more from here. I don't know how to keep it all in me.

OLIVIA

You don't have to. Keep what makes you happy and leave the rest behind.

LEE

Yeah. I just don't know how to get rid of bits and pieces without losing control of it all.

(exhaling deeply)

Sometimes I look at the stars and think about how much space is out there. It just goes on and on forever without an end. Or maybe it does stop somewhere and sometimes that scares me even more.

(pause)

There's just so much we'll never know. I mean, what if my favorite book isn't written until hundreds of years after I'm dead?

(sighing)

It's just a lot.

OLIVIA

(softly)

Roll over.

LEE turns so that she's on her side facing away from OLIVIA.
OLIVIA starts to rub her back.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

You know, it's okay to question why things are the way they are. That's what makes you a person. It's the way you get lost along the way that makes you, you.

(pause)

(MORE)

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
 You're a creative, Leebie. And a
 lot of times that means falling
 deeper off-course.
 (teasing)
 But, if we're being honest, I've
 never known you to show much
 interest in doing things the easy
 way.
 (pause, returning to a
 more serious tone)
 It never stops being a lot. You
 just learn to be okay with being
 small.

LEE holds back tears, staring intently at the wall.

LEE
 Remember my freshman year? When I
 threw the party at your show house
 on Ridgecrest.

OLIVIA is surprised at the randomness of the question. Her
 hand hovers, still, above LEE's back.

OLIVIA
 Yeah.

LEE gathers up the courage to continue.

LEE
 I'm sorry.

OLIVIA doesn't say anything. LEE continues staring straight
 ahead.

LEE (CONT'D)
 I took the part of you that you
 hide from everyone else and I
 trashed it.. for something so
 stupid, so..

LEE loses her words. She doesn't know how to say what she
 wants to say. She exhales deeply.

LEE (CONT'D)
 I don't know why I do that.
 (pause)
 I was mad at you for so long
 afterwards. I don't think I ever
 actually told you how sorry I was.

OLIVIA remains quiet. She blinks away the sting of tears in
 her eyes.

She forgave LEE long ago, but has waited a long time for an apology. She brings her hand back down to LEE's shoulder.

OLIVIA
Come here.

OLIVIA rolls her daughter over and pulls her close. LEE rests her head on OLIVIA's chest. They lay in silence, holding each other in a stranger's bed, while the silent record spins endlessly around and around.

EXT. LIAM'S HOUSE (AFTERNOON)

LEE, RILEY, LIAM, LILI, and SARAH lay around lazily outside LIAM's house. There are beers strewn about the grass. LEE is laying back into RILEY's lap. Her hair sticks messily to his skin. Her eyes are closed. RILEY twists a strand around in his finger. He drops it and leans back onto his hands.

RILEY
(to no one in particular)
What should we do tonight?

No one answers. They're tired from the sun and day drinking. RILEY sighs, looking up at the sky. He's getting restless.

RILEY (CONT'D)
We should do something special.

RILEY nudged LEE impatiently. She opens an eye, squinting into the sun. He leans over her.

RILEY (CONT'D)
What do you wanna do?

LEE
Mmm. I don't care.

RILEY
Come on. It's you and LILI's last night.

LEE closes her eyes again and rolls over sleepily.

LEE
You pick.

RILEY
(thinking out loud)
We could go to the pool.
(pause)
Or.. The amusement park?
(joking playfully)
(MORE)

RILEY (CONT'D)
We could sneak into one of your
mom's houses?

LEE
No.

RILEY
Come on. It'd be more fun than
staying here.

LEE's more awake now. She sits up.

LEE
I said no.

RILEY
Alright, well you pick something.

LILI
We could go out to the desert.

LIAM
I don't wanna drive all the way out
there.

LILI
It's not even that far.

LEE
The desert could be fun.

They start to rouse from their stupor.

RILEY
We could get some wood for a
bonfire.

SARAH
I haven't been to a bonfire in
ages.

LIAM
We still have some fireworks left
over from Fourth of July.

They're getting into the idea now.

RILEY
What do you say Leebie? Bonfire to
send you girls off?

LEE
That sounds perfect.

RILEY springs into action.

RILEY
 Alright. I've gotta run home, but
 I'll pick up booze and some weed on
 my way back.

RILEY (CONT'D)
 (to LIAM)
 You cool to drive out there?

LIAM
 I always drive.

SARAH
 Your car's the biggest.

LIAM groans but knows it's true.

RILEY
 And grab those fireworks too! I
 think we have some wooden pallets
 in the shed.

LEE
 Meet back here in an hour?

RILEY smiles and gives her a quick kiss.

RILEY
 See you then.

EXT. THE HIGHWAY TO THE DESERT (SAME DAY - EARLY EVENING)

LIAM drives. The road is mostly empty. It's still light outside, but the sun is low, giving the landscape a hazy glow. LEE sits on RILEY's lap in the passenger seat. SARAH and LILI are in the back with the supplies. The windows are down. LEE leans her head outside of the car. They are quiet. Simple, eerie music floats over them. Something like Killing Spree by Chromatics. There's a pervasive nervousness humming through the car - excitement or a sense of foreboding.

EXT. THE DESERT (SAME DAY - EARLY EVENING)

The same haunting melody drifts through the desert. The car is parked among the sand dunes. There's hilly desert all around them. The doors on the car rest on their hinges, haphazardly flung open and forgotten. As the sun starts to set they move the wooden pallets out of the car walking them over to a flat place in between the dunes. They work in pairs with SARAH helping to lift the wood out of the car.

They don't talk. Time slows their movements down, just so. They stack the wooden structures carefully on top of one another. It needs to be perfect.

The last piece is put in place. They surround the tower, admiring it. SARAH walks over from the car. She hands RILEY a container of gasoline and a worn box of matches. RILEY circles the structure, splashing gasoline as he goes. When he gets back to his original place he throws the empty can into the center.

Heavily, he slides open the box of matches, pulling one out and striking it along the side of the box. The match flutters to life and RILEY turns it in his hand looking at the way the flame moves slower now. He tosses the match. It hovers in the air. There is a moment of nothing, then suddenly the flames fling outwards, engulfing the tower of wood.

It's almost dark now. The bonfire illuminates the space, casting long shadows that stretch out from each of their feet. They stand still staring in awe at their creation. Watching how the fire dances.

EXT. THE DESERT (LATER THAT NIGHT)

The bonfire has burned down some. Several hours have passed. Bottles litter the ground. They're drunk. They laugh, chasing each other around the fire, pulling their victims down with them into the sand. They roll around laughing hysterically through a tangle of limbs. They keep drinking, spilling on themselves as they jump around.

LIAM
(trying to be serious, but
failing miserably)
I'm just saying! I'm just saying
that if I had to choose, I'd be
Bacchus!

RILEY and LEE explode in laughter. SARAH and LILI skip around closer to the fire.

RILEY
Do you even know who Bacchus is?

LIAM
God of wine you dumb fuck!
(starting to giggle)
You would literally just get to sit
around and drink wine all day!

LIAM starts to devolve into laughter as he tries to finish his explanation.

LIAM (CONT'D)
 He literally just sits there!
 Drinking wine.. All day long! He
 doesn't even have to get up cause
 that's what the cupids are for,
 man.
 (fully loosening it)
 I mean, he just sits there!
 Completely wasted while these fat
 fucking babies fly around playing
 harps and shit!

LIAM is laughing so hard, he doesn't even remember why he's
 laughing. RILEY and LIAM are laughing now too. SARAH and LILI
 run over, their arms around each others shoulders, staggering
 as they slip and sink into the sand. SARAH raises her beer
 unsteadily.

SARAH
 A toast!

LIAM
 (echoing SARAH)
 A toast!

SARAH
 To alcohol!

EVERYONE
 To alcohol!

They sloppily throw their beers back.

LIAM
 This is a special night, comrades.
 A special night, indeed.

RILEY
 (playing off LIAM)
 Ay good sir. And one that'll live
 in infamy for generations to come.

The group laughs at LIAM and RILEY's goofiness. There's a
 moment of pause as everyone settles down.

LEE
 Well, should we start heading back
 soon?

RILEY wraps his arms around her from behind, gathering her
 up. He pretends to be serious, but as he continues his speech
 it's obvious he's still playing in character.

RILEY

We haven't even gotten started yet.
Now we decide whether we go back or
forward. Or better yet, if we just
stay right here and give ourselves
to the funeral pyre!

RILEY buries his head into LEE's neck. Holding her arms down
as he pretends to bite her. He growls like an animal, shaking
his head. LEE screams and kicks her feet up laughing as she
tries to escape. He releases her and she runs over behind the
girls. The others laugh at the stunt, except for LILI. She
watches the whole thing unfold, staring intently at LEE with
a curious expression.

RILEY (CONT'D)

(dramatically, trying to
spook them)

Watch yourselves. There's a
thousand ways the desert can kill.

LILI

(rolling her eyes)

The only killers out here are us.

RILEY laughs. LILI's face is serious. Gradually a devilish
smile widens across her face. LILI howls into the night,
before leaping at LEE. LEE tries to run away, but LILI
catches her. The two stumble and spin to the ground, rolling
over each other in a fit of laughter.

LILI lays on top of LEE, smiling down at her. Her hair falls
across LEE's face. LILI presses her scarred hand against
LEE's.

LILI (CONT'D)

Let's end on a high note.

LILI pulls LEE up from the ground.

SARAH, RILEY, and LIAM walk towards them from the car
carrying a stack of something.

LIAM

You guys ready for a show?

LILI and LEE run over to inspect the fireworks, all spread
out in the sand.

SARAH

Start small and work our way up?

The rest of the group nods. LIAM pulls out a medium sized
tube from the stack.

He unwraps it and lights the end throwing it quickly away from them. There's a spark and a much louder bang. They cheer.

LIAM

Everyone grab one!

They scramble to pick a small tube. They line up straight and each stick a tube in the dirt, crouching behind them, wielding lighters and match boxes.

LILI

Ready? ONE. TWO. THREE!

They all spark their lighters/matches and hold them over the wick. The waxy strings begin to crackle. They all run back towards the car. There are several loud cracks and they look up as five rockets shoot into the sky, dissolving into sparkling light.

More pops shoot off to the left. Startled they turn towards the noise. LIAM is holding three lit Roman Candles above his head. He throws his head back and howls as the bursts shoot into the sky.

Everyone else runs back to the pile to grab some. Soon there are bursts flying from every direction as they scream into the night.

Their faces are bright and flushed with alcohol and adrenaline. The girls run in circles around the fire shooting off bursts of light into the air.

The stash is almost gone. RILEY shoots out some of the last smaller tubes. SARAH runs towards him and grabs another Roman Candle. She twirls around pointing the unlit stick at him and pretending to shoot. RILEY throws a popper he's just lit at her in retaliation. SARAH screams and jumps to the side as it sparks. RILEY laughs.

SARAH lights the end of the candle, pointing it towards RILEY. By the time it goes off RILEY has grabbed another candle and run behind the car. SARAH follows in pursuit. RILEY's candle now lit, he jumps up and shoots a burst of light past her head. SARAH squeals as the chase continues. They shoot a few more off at each other before SARAH runs back towards the fire. LIAM runs by, grabs a candle, and runs after SARAH.

RILEY shoots the last few sparks into the sky. He drops the candle and notices a large tube in the back of the car. He pulls it out. It's a large industrial grade firecracker.

RILEY
Holy shit.

He turns it in his hands before yelling out to LIAM.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Dude! How the fuck did you get
this?

LIAM is mid roman candle battle with the girls.

LIAM
Don't mess with that one. It's for
the finale!

LIAM and the girls continue to run around near the fire, screaming and shooting off sparks of light. RILEY continues to examine the large tube. He stands holding it for a moment, watching LEE as she runs around the fire. A grin spreads across his face. He walks over to a spot overlooking the fire and pushes the tube into the ground.

LIAM turns around and sees RILEY with his hand on the lit tube.

LIAM (CONT'D)
RILEY!

His shout gets the attention of the girls, who turn away from the fire. There's a loud crack as the rocket shoots into the air. It's dead silence for one second, two. The world is still. A ragged scream rips through the night. It's RILEY's. The rocket explodes overhead. Silver rain falls towards the sand.

Everyone runs towards RILEY. LEE is the first to get to him. He sits hunched over in the sand, clutching at his right arm. LEE comes to an abrupt stop just a few steps away from him, shocked by the image. RILEY's hand is mangled beyond recognition. His only remaining finger dangles by a thread of skin. There's so much blood. LEE's paralyzed. Watching as RILEY shakes and screams.

LIAM runs past RILEY and kneels down next to him. Throwing his arm around him, trying to survey the damage.

LIAM (CONT'D)
RILEY! Fuck! RILEY are you okay?

RILEY holds his bloody hand out his scream ripped from his throat. He stares at it, silent, in shock. Obviously, he's not okay.

LIAM (CONT'D)
RILEY! RILEY! Can your hear me man?

LILI and SARAH arrive at the scene. They gasp in shock. LEE hasn't moved.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Fuck, fuck, fuck. Come on RILEY
talk to me, man. Fuck!

LIAM (CONT'D)
We've gotta get him into town!

LILI and SARAH rush over. They help LIAM bring RILEY to his feet supporting his weight between them. They drag him towards the car, his feet trailing in the sand. They load him into the back.

LEE still hasn't moved. She's staring at the bonfire, unblinking. It's dying. The wood has collapsed. It glows, but the flames only get smaller and smaller. There are broken bottles and trash stuck in the sand. The glass glints in the fire's light.

LIAM gets into the car. As he pulls his seat belt on, he notices his shirt and hands. He's covered in blood. He pauses for a second, before buckling the seat belt in. The passenger seat is empty. Both girls are in the back with RILEY, trying to stop his bleeding. RILEY stares out the front window blankly.

LIAM looks out the window. His bloody hands are on the steering wheel, still wet. LEE is standing perfectly still a few feet away. Her back faces the car.

LIAM (CONT'D)
LEE! Godamnit! LEE get in the
fucking car!

LEE doesn't move. SARAH gasps in the back seat alternating between hyperventilating and chocking out sobs.

LIAM (CONT'D)
LEE!

LEE remains paralyzed, watching the fire silently burn out.

TRANSITION: THE DARK HIGH SCHOOL THEATER AISLE, RILEY IS SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE STAGE LIGHTS, HE STANDS PERFECTLY STILL FOR SEVERAL MOMENTS THEN BEGINS SLOWLY WALKING TOWARDS THE CAMERA

INT. RILEY'S HOSPITAL ROOM (THE NEXT DAY)

RILEY lays in a hospital bed. He's pale. His arm is wrapped tightly from his hand to his elbow. His other hand rests on top of his blankets. An IV runs into his hand and a plastic bracelet hangs from his arm. He is conscious, but drugged with pain killers. LEE sits stiffly in a plastic chair next to his bed.

The TV is on, but the sound is turned low. It's quiet except for the occasional sounds of nurses walking past the door. RILEY stares, focused on the screen. LEE watches him. She reaches forward and smooths out his blankets. She hesitates. She moves her hand to brush his hair off his forehead. RILEY flinches at her touch. She drops her hand and sits back.

They sit in silence staring at the TV for what feels like an eternity. RILEY finally speaks, keeping his eyes forward.

RILEY

You should have been on the road
hours ago.

LEE

Yeah.

She doesn't move. They sit for a while more. LEE turns to him.

LEE (CONT'D)

(hesitantly)
You're gunna get through this.

She knows immediately it's the wrong thing to say. They sit in an uncomfortable silence for a few moments.

LEE (CONT'D)

I could hang around a while
longer..

RILEY doesn't move his eyes from the TV screen. His face is hard - his jaw clenched.

RILEY

If you're gunna disappear again,
just do it.

LEE is caught off guard - part of her wanted him to beg her to stay. They sit in silence for a moment. LEE tries one last time as she stands up to leave.

LEE

Are you going to be okay?

RILEY
(flatly)
Does it matter anymore?

INT. HOSPITAL (SAME DAY)

LEE walks down the center of an empty hallway. It's sterile, starkly white. Her shoes echo off the walls and white linoleum. Her face is blank and the hallway is long. She walks, her pace even. She turns a corner and pushes open a heavy door.

EXT. HOSPITAL (SAME DAY)

Sunlight floods through the doorway. LEE shields her eyes as she walks through the door and continues towards the parking lot. It's warm. Cars and birds make noise in the distance. The asphalt is cracked. The parking lot is fairly empty. She crosses the lengthy distance to her car and gets inside.

Her bags are in the back. The typewriter in the passenger seat. She's already said her good-byes. She closes the door and turns on the car. The radio sparks on mid song, flooding the car with music. LEE doesn't seem to hear it. She runs her fingertips over the steering wheel, before wrapping them around the sides. She grips the wheel tightly staring straight ahead. We sit with her in the car for a minute or two, unmoving. She looks like a photograph, she barely even breathes. The song on the radio ends and another comes on. Still she just sits. Abruptly, she inhales quick and loud, gasping in air. She's cut off by black before she can complete the sound.

APPENDIX

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

LEE WALLACE (early-mid twenties)

LEE is a recent grad from San Francisco State University who has returned home to El Paso, Texas for two weeks before leaving for a new job at a literary journal in New York. LEE has a habit of disappearing from people's lives and has not spoken to any of her high school friends in four years. She means well, but often (obliviously) ends up using other people for her own personal gain. She has a close relationship with her wealthy family, especially her mother OLIVIA and uncle PAUL. She is poetic and romantic in the way she thinks about the world. She is reunited with her high school boyfriend RILEY and the rest of the group, and begins an obsessive quest to relive their high school memories together. In the end, she must decide whether to remain in the past or face an unknown future.

RILEY BIDWELL (early-mid twenties)

LEE'S high school boyfriend and part of the friend group. RILEY grew up in El Paso. His parents are very wealthy and RILEY has never had to worry about money. RILEY got involved with music early on and all through middle school and high school played bass in a band. They quickly became the famed local band and played many shows in small neighborhood venues to sold-out crowds of their peers. This gave RILEY a sense of fame early on. He secretly loves being recognized and takes advantage of his special circumstances. RILEY decided not to go to college after high school, instead taking time off to work with the band. While they have high hopes for fame, everyone knows they won't make it outside of the city. He has a good heart and has genuinely always had a soft spot for LEE, but ultimately they aren't right together. Their relationship was always passionate, but became quietly abusive in the way they became so wound up in one another, almost obsessive. When he gets back with LEE it is hard to tell if he has genuine feelings that he has harbored over the years or if he is merely trying to secure his place in a romanticized failed relationship.

LIAM MORROW (early-mid twenties)

LIAM is RILEY'S childhood best friend and also a member of the band (drummer). LIAM comes from a high-income old-El Paso family and met RILEY at private elementary school. LIAM is the biggest partier in the group and uses drugs often. While he's crazy, loud and irresponsible, he genuinely cares for his friends and is very loyal to them. He likes to keep things light and harbors a childlike excitement for what he perceives as the band's imminent rise to fame. LIAM serves as the fun, goofy second-in-command of the group, but when he's confronted with a serious accident, he quickly takes charge.

LILI DELEON (early-mid twenties)

LILI is from an upper-middle class Hispanic family. She went to public school where she became close friends with LEE at a young age. LILI's family has very traditional values of gender and religion that are important to them. In middle school LILI realized she was bi-sexual, but has hid it from most everyone. Her close friends in the group know, but she feels oppressed by the contradicting values of her family. LILI has the closest connection with LEE, but this relationship is sometimes strained by their history of emotional/sexual encounters. Wanting to get out of the city, she went to college on the east coast and double majored in English and Studio Art. She gained local acclaim for her art and applied for a yearlong art fellowship in her last year. Over the summer, she is waiting to hear back about the fellowship and does not have much of a backup plan in store if she doesn't get it.

SARAH TOMER (early-mid twenties)

SARA is from a lower income family than the rest of the group. Her parents divorced when she was young and her father never kept up with child support payments. Her mother was a college dropout and while she has tried hard to provide for herself and SARA, it has been difficult for her to find a good job. SARA has always been interested in technology and would make money in high school by fixing computers. There wasn't enough money for her to go to college out of the city so she went to UT El Paso to study computer science. She has to make the decision over the summer whether to return to school to get a master's degree or join the working force. She knows she has a much better chance of getting a job with a higher degree, but also knows she can't afford to pay for more school right now. She has long held an interest in the occult and practices simple, ritual magic as a means of escapism. She has made some other friends in college, but still spends plenty of time partying with RILEY and LIAM. She is very smart, but harbors anger at the system and her unfair situation.

MATEO MEDINA (early-mid twenties)

MATEO comes from a middle class Hispanic family. He has never had to worry much about money, but was raised to know the importance of working hard and doing well in school. MATEO is the middle child of five. He went to public school and met RILEY and LIAM in high school. He is now studying politics in Washington D.C. He has made new friends since high school and is very involved with local and school politics. He is especially close with his work friends - he works in the office of an El Paso House Representative. He is very liberal and passionate about social change. Over the summer after graduating college he is faced with the decision of staying at his job or going to graduate school out of the city. He has trouble going along with some of the group's recreated stunts. He is very positive about his future and doesn't feel the same need as the others to revisit his past. He has become a bit of an "outsider" of the group because of his focus on the future, and often serves as the voice of reason.

PETER WALLACE (50s-60s)

LEE's father, PETER, is a smart, kind man and professor at UTEP. He has a loving, but sometimes stale relationship with his wife OLIVIA. PETER blames himself for his younger brother's past suicide attempt, and now spends most of his time and energy trying to "fix" him. He has strong views about how things should be done and cares about public appearance. He is very loving towards his family, but often times oblivious to their actual needs.

OLIVIA WALLACE (50s-60s)

LEE's mother, OLIVIA, is very close to LEE and they have similar tendencies to romanticize things. OLIVIA is a real estate agent, and often hangs out in the homes she shows. She loves her husband and family, but faces similar anxieties about her past and future as LEE. She uses the show homes as a secret place to hide and figure herself out.

PAUL WALLACE (50s-60s)

LEE's uncle and PETER's brother, PAUL, has always been a fun, rebellious type. He understands LEE the best, and they have a very close relationship. Several years earlier, he accidentally overdosed on alcohol and drugs; an event that everyone believes to have been a suicide attempt. He lives with OLIVIA and PETER, under surveillance. He is good humored about his situation, but is extremely frustrated by his identity as the local suicidal, an untrue representation that he had no part in constructing.

PLOT SUMMARY

What We Were is a feature-length film that follows 22-year-old Lee Wallace, as she navigates a pivotal transition in her life. After graduating college, Lee returns home to El Paso, Texas for two weeks, before moving to New York to start her adult life as a writer for a literary magazine. Upon her arrival, she moves back into her childhood home inhabited by: Olivia, Lee's mother and a real estate agent who spends her days hiding out in her clients' empty homes, Paul, Lee's uncle who struggles to reinvent himself in a community that won't let him forget a past suicide attempt, and Peter, Lee's father who struggles to maintain control over his uncontrollable family.

On her first night back, Lee is sent to pick up groceries from the neighborhood store, where she's spotted by two of her old friends, Lili and Sarah, who she hasn't seen in over four years. They tell her that the other members of their high school friend group are also in town. The group of six, known in high school for being suspiciously insular, consisted of Lee, Lili, Sarah, Riley, Liam, and Mateo. But after breaking up with Riley the day she left for college, Lee disappeared from the clique. She went to school out of state and cut off all contact with them, even though the rest of the group maintained their close bond. Lili and Sarah invite her to join them later that night at Liam's house.

Motivated by nostalgia and her fear of the future, Lee decides to go. After catching up and reminiscing, they decide to sneak into the neighborhood pool, something they haven't done since high school. The return to a place from their communal past allows Lee to reconnect with both Riley and Lili, each of whom have had feelings for her, forging a bizarre triangle of attachment and confused sexuality, heightened by her absence. The next day Riley shows up at Lee's house. On a whim,

Lee ambiguously agrees to get back together with him. Their relationship unites the group for the first time in years and instigates a journey to recreate moments from their time together in high school. What begins as an endearing quest for nostalgic fun soon turns to obsession, as they grow more and more desperate to experience the rush of reliving their memories. While Riley and Lee's relationship is a fraud, they trick themselves into love by carefully piecing back together their previously entwined identities.

During the group's next outing, they revisit their high school using a stolen key to get into the building. In the historic theater, they dance, bathed in colored light. Reality slips away. Riley leads Lee out of the theater as the rest of the group lights candles in Riley's room and makes his bed. In the theater, their bodies lose focus and merge together. Riley and Lee continue down the dark theater aisle, which has grown infinitely long since they arrived. Lili, Sarah, Mateo, and Liam move trance-like on the stage, while simultaneously putting the finishing touches on Riley's room in a space unhinged from reality. Riley and Lee arrive in the bedroom, alone. The dancing bodies on the stage slip into darkness as Riley and Lee relive the ritual of losing their virginities, formally binding Lee back together with the group.

A few days later, a celebratory family brunch reinforces Lee's anxiety about her upcoming move. As their food arrives, her parents gift her with a typewriter and toast to her success. Overwhelmed by her parents' vision of a future with no room for failure, Lee excuses herself. Paul joins her and they sit outside staring out at the expansive desert that surrounds them. Lee confesses that she's haunted by the thought of never finding her own story. Meanwhile, Lee continues to seek comfort in Riley, but after a

serious talk with Mateo at a divey karaoke bar, she begins to doubt herself. As Lee realizes her dissatisfaction with Riley, she seeks affirmation in Lili. Later that night outside the bar, Lee kisses Lili, exploiting her sexuality in an attempt to regain control. Lili recognizes Lee's familiar sexual cycle and calmly tells her that she won't let Lee use her again.

As they approach their last days together, the activities of the group become more and more dangerous, unhealthy, and cult-like as they attempt to recreate the thrill of coming of age. On their last night, they outdo themselves with a bonfire in the desert, determined to lose themselves in the past one last time. Amidst the chaos, a firework malfunctions, causing Riley to lose most of his right hand. The dramatic accident makes it impossible for him to continue with his musical career, destroying all sense of direction in his life. It's at this point, confronted with her duty as Riley's girlfriend to sit by his bedside and nurse him back to health, that Lee finally realizes she must leave her past behind. She pays one final visit to Riley at the hospital before closing the door on her high school identity for good as she leaves for her new life in New York.

PROJECT TIMELINE

Pre-Production (December 2015-July 2016)

- Creative brainstorming and collaboration on timeline with thesis committee
- Literary and film research (methods, theory, character, location, similar films, inspirations, etc.)
- Development of Characters (completed early February 2016)
- Treatment Development (completed mid-February 2016)
- First Full Screenplay Draft (completed mid-March)
- Applications and research on various fundraising methods and grants
- Script Workshops with Thesis Committee and development of three additional drafts
- Assembling Crew (discussing schedules, rates, expectations, needs, etc.)
- Casting (three-rounds, discussing schedules, rates, expectations, etc.)
- Location Scouting (discussing schedules, rates, permits, insurance, etc.)
- Assembling an Insurance Plan for cast, crew, equipment, and locations, and scheduling police, fire marshals, border patrol, lifeguards, etc. as needed
- Development of shot lists, storyboards, mood boards, production schedules, prop lists, location photos, acting rehearsals, lighting diagrams, maps, etc.
- Frequent and consistent communication with cast and crew
- Creation of social media presence, artwork, website, t-shirts, etc.
- Arranging music licenses

Production (July - August 2016)

- Preliminary test footage and landscape shoots (June 2016)
- Main production scheduled for fourteen days over a three-week period (July 2016)
- Reshoots and pick-ups (August 2016)
- Consistent and frequent communication with cast and crew, acting rehearsals, call sheets and additional scheduling, dailies, etc.

Post-Production (August 2016 - TBD)

- Sorting, naming, organizing footage
- Assembly of a rough cut (December 2016)
- Workshopping cuts with thesis committee and faculty advisors, feedback screenings, etc.
- Development of Final Cut
- Color Correction, Special Effects, Sound Mixing, etc.

Distribution (January 2017 - TBD)

- Private screening events and presentation at Plan II Thesis Symposium
- Applications to eligible film festivals (i.e. Cannes, Sundance, AFF, TIFF, SXSW, Berlin, etc.)
- Continued promotion via merchandising, publicity coordination, social media, etc.
- Exploring any and all avenues for distribution

WHAT WE WERE

MASTER BUDGET

Updated:

Category	Item/Position/Character	Name/Descrip	Cost/Day	# Days	Capped	Lump Sum / Subtotal	Description
Crew							
	Assistant Director	Stefan Allen	\$ 50.00	30		\$ 2,000.00	Plus, Lodging, Food, Misc
	Apartment Expense					\$ 1,600.00	2 months x \$800
	Second Assist Director	Tamara Davis	\$ 50.00	30		\$ 1,750.00	Paid 30 days plus \$250 bonus
	1st Assistant Camera	Nico Aguilera	\$ 75.00	30		\$ 2,500.00	Paid 30 days plus \$250 bonus
	2nd Assit. Camera / Grip	Ned Sampson				\$ 900.00	
	Gaffer	Ryan	\$ -	30		\$ -	
	Sound	Carlos Corral	\$ 250.00	20 Yes		\$ 5,000.00	Includes up to 4 extra days, Incl Insurance
	Casting Director	Austin Savage	\$ 100.00	30 Yes		\$ 3,250.00	Incl \$250 bonus
	FX Makeup / Wardrobe	Leticia Pena				\$ 300.00	
	DIT	Richard Horak	\$ -	30		\$ -	
	Composer					\$ -	
	Sound Editor / Design					\$ -	
	Color Grading					\$ -	
	Design/Art	Kira Viola				\$ -	
	PA/Grip	Erin Solis (Carlos)				\$ -	
		Aaron Pokluda				\$ -	
		Rick Holguin				\$ 440.00	
		John Guttierrez				\$ 240.00	
		Eliot Calhoun				\$ -	
	Subtotal - Crew					\$ 17,980.00	
Cast							
	Lee	Jeni Robins		14		\$ 750.00	Contract \$500
	Riley	Tyler Dudley				\$ 600.00	Contract \$400
	Sarah	Asia Sias				\$ 450.00	Contract \$300
	Lili	Aurore Tarango				\$ 450.00	Contract \$300
	Mateo	Diego Rico				\$ 375.00	Contract \$250
	Liam	Brandon Abeyta				\$ 375.00	Contract \$250
	Olivia (Mom)	Jennifer Wright	\$ 100.00	4		\$ 400.00	Contract \$400 (Leslie, Frausto, ADC, Horak)
	Paul	Jay Stratton	\$ 100.00	3		\$ 300.00	Contract \$300
	Peter	Justin Stone	\$ 100.00	3		\$ 300.00	Contract \$300
	Extras		\$ -	30		\$ -	
	Transportation	Airfare/Lodging?				\$ -	
	Subtotal - Cast					\$ 4,000.00	
Location Costs							
	El Paso High School					\$ 400.00	Paid to EPISD
	Security			2		\$ 385.00	Paid to EPISD
	Tennis Club		\$ -			\$ -	
	Security / Lifeguard		\$ -	3		\$ -	
	Homes		\$ -			\$ -	
	Ranch / Desert		\$ -			\$ -	
	Bar / Monarch		\$ -			\$ -	
	Security		\$ -	2		\$ -	
	Ardovinos		\$ -			\$ -	
	Subtotal - Location					\$ 785.00	
Craft							
	Breakfast		\$ 45.00	12		\$ 540.00	Assume Avg. 15 people/day x \$3
	Lunches		\$ 45.00	22		\$ 990.00	Assume Avg. 15 people/day x \$3
	Dinners		\$ 60.00	22		\$ 1,320.00	Assume Avg. 15 people/day x \$4
	Drinks / Ice		\$ 25.00	25		\$ 625.00	
	Wrap Party					\$ 500.00	Lump Sum
	Subtotal - Craft					\$ 3,975.00	
Equipment							
	Subtotal - Equipment					\$ 25,000.00	
	Rental	A7s II (Diego)				\$ 300.00	
	Subtotal - Equipment					\$ 25,300.00	
Overhead							
	Office Expense					\$ -	
	Internet / Utilities					\$ 600.00	3 Months x \$200
	Insurance - GL / Auto / WC					\$ 3,143.00	Paid 6/23/16
	Insurance - Equipment					\$ 322.00	Paid 6/23/16
	Film Permit					\$ 40.00	
	Park Permit					\$ 140.00	
	Portable Toilets	\$ 120.00	5			\$ 600.00	
	Misc.					\$ 500.00	
	Subtotal - Overhead					\$ 5,345.00	
Total - Production Cost				111	#REF!		

What We Were

Production 2016
Film Equipment Summary

Item	Manufacturer	Model #	Cost	Seller
LED Light Kit	Fiilex	K301 (3 ea. P360)	\$	1,999.00
LED Light Accessories	Fiilex	2" Fresnel, P2Q kit, Dome Diff., Softbox	\$	626.00
Fresnel	Fiilex	P2Q	\$	320.00
Scrim Jim	Scrim Jim	6x6 w/black cover	\$	729.00
Reflectors	Westcott	40" (2)	\$	40.00
Camera	Sony	PXW-FS5	\$	5,599.00
Lens Adapter	Metabones	Speed Booster Ultra - Nikon F to Sony	\$	479.00
Tripod	Benro?	BV8 with Tandem Tripod	\$	664.05
SD Cards	Hoodman	4 each SDXC, Class 10 128gb	\$	720.00
Color Checker	X-Rite	Color Checker Passport	\$	89.99
Batteries - Recorder	Volta	NP-F770 - 2 each	\$	71.98
Batteries - Camera	Sony	BP-U60 56 Wh	\$	269.99
SDI Cable	Hosa	Pro 75ohm SDI Cable	\$	12.99
HDMI Cable				
Camera Base, cage and rig	Lanparte	BSK-01	\$	720.76
	Lanparte	Speed Crank, Gear, Reverse Gear	\$	159.00
	Lanparte	C-arm, Magic Arm, Gear, Pin, Rods, Pinch	\$	499.04
External Monitor/Recorder	Atomos	Shogun Flame	\$	1,274.25
SSD Drives	Sandisc	Extreme Pro 448gb (2)	\$	398.00
Batteries	IndiPro	95w, Gold Post (2) with Charger	\$	370.00
Battery Charger	IndiPro	Dual Charger, Gold Mount	\$	225.00
D-Tap Cable - Lights	Fiilex	A2	\$	35.00
Scrim Jim Clamps			\$	90.00
Camera Case	Think Tank	Video Workhorse 25	\$	250.00
C-Stands	Matthews	2 each - C Stands with Sliding Leg	\$	317.90
Clamps, Clips				
Sand Bags - 25 #	Samy's	8 each	\$	144.00
- 15 #	Matthews	4 each	\$	116.00
Editing Monitor	Eizo	CG247	\$	1,746.08
Editing Computer	Dell	5810, 16gb ram, Nvidia K4200	\$	1,619.95
RAM		4- 4gb	\$	163.40
Lens Backpack	Think Tank	Streetwalker Harddrive	\$	189.00
Gaffers Tape			\$	104.00
Slate Clapper			\$	55.00
Storage Drives	G-Technology	2 each - G-Raid USB 8TB	\$	1,050.00
		1 each G-Drive USB 4TB	\$	179.00
Gitzo 75mm ball Head Adapter	Gitzo	75mm Bowl	\$	76.88
Hi Hat	Benro	BEHH75AV	\$	199.00
D-Tap Cable - Lighting	Fiilex	FIFLXA012 (2 each)	\$	78.00
SD Card Reader	Lexar		\$	32.49
SSD Docking Station	Atomos	ATOMDCK003	\$	49.95
CD Card Case	Pelican		\$	17.19
USB 3 Card	Sonnet	SOUSB34PME (2 each)	\$	115.98
Arm	Lanparte	Magic Arm		
Arm	Matthews	Infinity Arm		

Total	112	\$	21,895.87
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katherine Horak is a student at the University of Texas at Austin, majoring in Plan II Honors and Radio-Television-Film, and a member of Phi Beta Kappa. In 2014, Horak worked as a production designer on the short film “How to Have Ever”, which won the Best Film and Audience Choice awards at the Creative Minds in Cannes Filmmaker Showcase and went on to be screened as part of the Short Film Corner at Cannes in 2015. She has been to the Cannes Film Festival twice with the Creative Mind Group and is an alumna of both their filmmaking and internship programs. She has worked on over ten film projects over the last year and a half, and was one of fifteen students chosen countrywide to attend the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, Czech Republic, as part of the Fall 2015 CIEE Film Studies Program. There she wrote, co-directed, shot, and edited the short film “Home,” which was nominated by Pavel Jech, Dean of FAMU, to the Cannes Film Festival Student Competition. Horak plans to work briefly within the Austin film community after graduation before moving abroad. She plans to pursue her passion for artistic creation and exploration as long as she continues to have things to say.